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ABSTRACT

Representing part of the first phase of a 5-year ethnographic research project, this report explores connections between school achievement and Irish ethnicity. Part 1 of the report reviews Irish history from 400 B.C. through the Irish famines of the mid-1800s, highlighting England's cultural and economic suppression of Ireland. Part 2 describes the harsh economic experience of Irish immigrants from 1820 to 1865, and discusses the ways in which this experience helped frame Irish identity in America. Focusing on the period from 1865 to 1930, part 3 explores the ways in which Irish-Americans facilitated the creation of a new identity through the control of local politics; the use of community and volunteer organizations to support the integration of new Irish-Americans; the development of parallel social structures; and the creation of parochial schools as alternatives to public education. Part 4 examines the acculturation and economic achievements of Irish-Americans, and discusses the role of the family in contributing to academic achievement. This section also examines several studies and oral histories that explore the ways in which Irish ethnicity deeply influences the identity of Irish-Americans. Part 5 suggests ways to promote academic success in Irish-American children, and asserts that the study of a people's history can help one interpret current patterns of response to ethnic differences. A list of 93 references is included. (MM)

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A Saga of Irish-American Achievement: Constructing a Positive Identity

Susan McAllister Swap and Jean Krasnow

Report No. 11 / October 1992

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A Saga of Irish-American Achievement:

Constructing a Positive Identity

Susan McAllister Swap and Jean Krasnow

Wheelock College

Report No. 11

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CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

The nation's schools must do more to improve the education of all children, but schools cannot do this alone. More will be accomplished if families and communities work with children, with each other, and with schools to promote successful students.

The mission of this Center is to conduct research, evaluations, policy analyses, and dissemination to produce new and useful knowledge about how families, schools, and communities influence student motivation, learning, and development. A second important goal is to improve the connections between and among these major social institutions.

Two research programs guide the Center's work: the Program on the Early Years of Childhood, covering children aged 0-10 through the elementary grades; and the Program on the Years of Early and Late Adolescence, covering youngsters aged 11-19 through the middle and high school grades.

Research on family, school, and community connections must be conducted to understand more about all children and all families, not just those who are economically and educationally advantaged or already connected to school and community resources. The Center's projects pay particular attention to the diversity of family cultures and backgrounds and to the diversity in family, school, and community practices that support families in helping children succeed across the years of childhood and adolescence. Projects also examine policies at the federal, state, and local levels that produce effective partnerships.

A third program of Institutional Activities includes a wide range of dissemination projects to extend the Center's national leadership. The Center's work will yield new information, practices, and policies to promote partnerships among families, communities, and schools to benefit children's learning.

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Abstract

This paper explores the connections between achievement and Irish ethnicity. The attempt to understand the meaning of achievement to current Irish-Americans prompts an exploration of the value ascribed to learning in Celtic tradition, for the Irish under English rule, for Irish-Americans in the 19th century, and for Irish-Americans today. This history reveals continuity in Irish reverence for learning, but sharply different levels of achievement in different eras. A major theme of this paper is how the social meaning of Irish Catholic ethnicity was constructed and reconstructed for the Irish by the dominant society in Ireland and America. Another important theme is how the Irish were able to overcome negative stereotyping and limited access to opportunity. The roles of school, family, and community in maintaining continuity in Irish traditions are explored. Finally, we outline the debate over the meaning of Irish ethnicity in America today and consider implications for the school achievement of Irish-Americans.

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Introduction

Why should we worry about the achievement of Irish-American children in school? The levels of educational achievement and occupational status of Irish-Americans have been above the national average for several decades. Why should we be concerned about how the history and culture of Irish-American families might influence their children's learning? The largest wave of Irish immigration occurred between 1840 and 1860, many generations ago. Although smaller numbers continue to arrive from Ireland, is it likely that there is any continuing legacy or enduring meaning that derives from an Irish heritage?

To answer these questions, we felt that in the overall context of trying to understand how ethnicity affects school achievement, the study of a white, Western European culture would be instructive. We have discovered that these cultures have received relatively little differentiated attention in recent educational literature. Moreover, when the Irish arrived in massive numbers on America's shores in the 19th century, they experienced significant economic discrimination and anti-Catholic hostility. We found it useful to explore why the reaction of American citizens was negative and what happened over time that eventually permitted Irish assimilation into mainstream culture. Finally, as educators, we became particularly intrigued with the discovery that there are certain orientations toward achievement that apparently continue to be transmitted by some Irish-American families over time, despite many changes in circumstance.

PART I: THE LEGACY OF IRISH HISTORY

In order to understand the nature of Irish ethnicity and the "Irish" influence on achievement, we felt the need to look back in time. We explored the roots of Irish cultural identity and the economic and political conditions in Ireland which spawned the massive migration to the United States and shaped the individuals who arrived.

The history that we shall summarize has been largely ignored in our schools. We have used an Irish-Catholic lens in seeking highlights and interpretations. The problem of finding "the" truth in studying Irish history has long troubled chroniclers, as Thackeray pointed out in 1842 in his Irish Sketch Book: "'To have an opinion about Ireland, one must begin by getting at the truth; and where is it to be had in the country? Or rather, there are two truths, the Catholic truth and the Protestant truth. . . . Belief is made a party business'" (as quoted in Foster, 1988, p. 319). We have chosen to look primarily at the Irish Catholic "truth" because Catholic identity was so important in creating a definition of Irish ethnicity in America. As Weisz (1976) comments, "To the Irish, Catholicism and Irishness are inseparable. Both in Ireland and in the United States, the Irish could demonstrate their attachment to Ireland through attachment to the Church. To be Irish is to be Catholic" (p. 40).

The first theme we will explore is the rich cultural legacy of the Celtic people who populated Ireland centuries ago.

Early Irish History: A Rich Cultural Legacy

An exhibit displayed in Florence in 1991 celebrated Celtic art as the earliest pan-European culture. The intricacy and beauty of the artistic motifs inspired admiration and extensive critical comment. The BBC in London in conjunction with national television in France and Austria presented six 55-minute documentaries in a series called The Celts, emphasizing their lasting contribution to Western civilization. Such recognition was long overdue and we may well ask how it is that this culture has received relatively little popular and scholarly attention.

In Ireland, Celtic influence, beginning about 400 B.C., forged cultural unity: a common language and a rich oral tradition of poetry and song; laws that reflected customs and values of the entire island population; and a distinctive artistic style used in stone carvings, sculpture, and metalwork that continued to influence artists through the Middle Ages (Delaney, 1989; FitzGibbon, 1983).

It is estimated that the first Christian missionaries arrived in Ireland in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. St. Patrick was the most influential of these missionaries, in part because he traveled widely, and in part because he acknowledged and incorporated aspects of the Celtic religious tradition into the rituals of the Roman Catholic church. The early missionaries established monasteries across

Ireland. Originally retreats from the world, these monasteries became "bearers of a rich and varied literary and artistic culture" through the patronage of the wealthy and powerful (Foster, 1989, p. 10).

The monasteries became centers of scholarship and preserved much of the learning of antiquity. Work conducted at these sites contributed to the flowering of the arts (particularly illumination, calligraphy, and metalwork) and to the compilation of a wide-ranging code of law in Irish and Latin that dealt with inheritance, government, property, and marriage and legal procedures for the church and secular society. The Celtic Catholic church became the religious and intellectual center of Irish culture. From the fifth to eighth centuries, while chaos reigned in most of Europe, Celtic Ireland was experiencing its golden age (FitzGibbon, 1983).

Danish raids which concentrated on these monastic towns destroyed much of the artistic and scholarly legacy and weakened the Celtic Catholic church, so that when the Normans (from England) began their conquest of Ireland in the twelfth century, both Celtic Christianity and Irish culture had "slipped from golden peaks of the past." Still, a rich tradition of literature and art survived in the country such that "the Irish were probably more culturally sophisticated than many other Europeans, certainly more so than their English 'guests'" (McCaffrey, 1976, p. 13).

Since this paper deals with educational achievement, it is important to note that the Celts in Ireland initiated an important scholarly tradition whose emissaries were Druids, poets, and bards. As FitzGibbon (1983) explains, although Druids are often thought of today as having been "vulgar magicians or conjurers" (p. 50), they were actually the spiritual and temporal advisors to the tribal leaders as well as the custodians of the tribe's beliefs and education. He contends that "In Ireland, some, if not all of these men could write and some knew Latin and probably Greek" (p. 49). Celtic lore was not written down, but not because the Druids were illiterate. FitzGibbon explains:

> The Druid's whole justification . . . was based on an enormous knowledge of tribal history, passed down verbally and with the greatest possible exactitude. . . . That they did not write the sagas and genealogies can only have been a rigid form of professional protection. To have druidical power, a man had to have a long and arduous training. The absolute purity of druidical knowledge could only be maintained by such exclusivity, for the written word can be tampered with in a multitude of ways for a multitude of purposes. (p. 49)

Poets contributed to the tradition of oral scholarship as well. They were very powerful courtiers, responsible for glorifying the chieftan and cursing his enemies. As FitzGibbon (1983) explained, the early Irish believed that magic was dormant in words and that a curse could lead even to the death of the enemy. Thus, the ritualistic exchange of insults before battle might shame or kill an opponent outright, making battle unnecessary; insults woven into the epic saga of a clan by the poet might reverberate for generations. In order to become a poet, at least seven stories of varying length had to be learned precisely; to reach the tenth and highest grade as a poet, at least 350 stories had to be memorized. The poets and Druids were the carriers of Celtic culture in Ireland for about a thousand years and reached the height of their power about 500 A.D. Monks and then priests were the inheritors of much of this lore as well as the methods of scholarship they developed.

Bards were the interpreters of the poets' words, carrying good stories and tribal histories from one part of the countryside to another, often with musical accompaniment. The legacy of history and language as communicated by the bards was so important to the Irish that they maintained bardic schools to carry on these traditions until the beginning of the 18th century. The schools were "Open only to such as were descended of Poets, and reputed within their Tribes," and qualifications for entrance included "reading well, writing the Mother-tongue, and a strong Memory" (O'Sullevane, 1722, as quoted in Deane, v. 1, p. 972). These schools maintained exacting standards and required pupils to work long hours for six or seven years to master the literature.

The work of the school was highly valued by the community. According to O'Sullevane, not only were the pupils: "very well entertained, and made much of" on Saturdays, but "they sent in by turns every week from far and near, Liquors, and all manner of Provision toward the Subsistence of the Academy; so that the Chief Poet was at little or no Charges, but on the contrary got very well by it" (pp. 972-973).

Greeley (1972) insists that today's Irish-Americans have been shaped by their Celtic past, highlighting the persistence of the playful, sometimes savage or obscene comic spirit; an emphasis on the hero and heroic; polished gifts in poetry and language; and a legal system based on custom rather than rigid enforcement of laws. He notes that Gaelic, the carrier of the Celtic oral tradition, was spoken by many of the nineteenth century immigrants to America, and concludes that: "If the Irish ever

become interested in understanding themselves . . . they will have no choice but to face their Celtic past" (p. 60).

The English Suppress Irish Cultural and Economic Development

The second important theme in this review is how England was able to redefine the Irish identity for the larger world, and even to some degree for the Irish themselves, through military conquest, religious persecution, and economic exploitation. However we might value the Celtic culture today, the Normans did not, as this excerpt from the 1187 History and Topography of Ireland compiled by one of the invading Normans, Gerald of Wales, documents:

> They are a wild and inhospitable people. They live on beasts only, and live like beasts. They have not progressed at all from the primitive habits of pastoral living. . . . This people is, then, a barbarous people, literally barbarous. Judged according to modern ideas, they are uncultivated, not only in the external appearance of their dress, but also in their flowing hair and beards. . . . Their natural qualities are excellent. But almost everything acquired is deplorable. (As quoted in Deane, v. 1, p. 239)

The dominant English perception of the Irish, beginning with the Norman invasion and continuing through the nineteenth century, was that the Irish were savages to be both feared and reviled. Carpenter and Harrison (1991) state that the history of Ireland by Gerald of Wales that was briefly cited above "had immense influence and was referred to by every Englishman writing about Ireland for several hundred years" (p. 238). In contrast, the contributions of the Catholic Celtic culture went largely unexplored or were trivialized by the English conquerors.

The Norman settlers did not cause great changes in Irish ways; rather, the Normans became largely integrated into Irish customs and traditions. However, English control was expanded in Ireland in 1541, when prompted by concern that Ireland might become a military threat or form alliances with England's enemies, Henry VIII forced the Irish parliament to declare him King of Ireland and imposed English laws on the country.

During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), the English developed a plantation policy to fully colonize Ireland by depriving the Catholic Irish noblemen of their property, driving the Irish peasant off the land, and creating plantations of

English settlers. Later, during the English Civil War, two-thirds of the remaining Irish land was given to Cromwell's supporters, and thousands of involuntary Catholic migrants -- political and military prisoners and their dependents -- were sold into servitude (Blessing, 1980). As Kirkham (1990) explains:

> . . . from at least the 1620s Irish indentured servants and transported vagrants and felons formed a substantial part of the labour force in the Caribbean islands and the tobacco plantations of Virginia and Maryland. In the late 1660s, for example, there were at least 12,000 Irish in the West Indies, of whom 8,000 were in Barbados. These were surviving populations: mortality rates were high and the total numbers who made the transatlantic voyage were substantially larger. (p. 82)

By the end of the 17th century, an English Protestant minority owned 95% of the country's property and enjoyed a complete monopoly over political power in Ireland. The Catholic majority held 5% of the property and paid tithes to support the Protestant religious establishment (Greeley, 1972).

The most clearly articulated instruments of Irish subjugation were the Penal Codes passed by the English Parliament in 1691. Under these provisions, no Irish Catholic could vote, serve on a jury, enter the army or navy, teach school, carry a gun, or own a horse worth more than five pounds. No Irish Catholic could enter the University, become a lawyer, work for the government, or marry a Protestant. Education at Trinity College in Dublin was for Protestants only. Irish Catholics could not maintain schools or send their children abroad to be educated. No spires were allowed on Catholic churches. All Catholic priests were required to register, and by 1719 all bishops were banned from Ireland. These laws systematically excluded the Irish from all political and social benefits of organized society (Shannon, 1963). Fallows (1979) elaborates:

> Although the primary aim of the Penal Laws was to humiliate and demoralize the Irish Catholics as a people, rather than specifically to destroy Irish Catholicism, the strict enforcement of the political, social, and economic aspects of the Penal Laws was widely interpreted by Irish Catholics as an attempt to wipe out Catholicism in Ireland. (p. 13)

The Irish continuously challenged the English presence with rebellions; first in 1537, then in 1595, 1641, 1649, 1689, 1789, and 1803. These were bloody wars of reprisals, followed by counter-reprisals. The cycle of revolt and repression was

such that educational institutions, industry, science, and technology had little opportunity to develop. The monasteries preserved much of the cultural traditions, but generations of Irish aristocracy were destroyed. Irish industries that did provide competition for English goods (e.g., finished woolens, breweries, silver, glass, and furniture) were ruthlessly taxed or suppressed as they were in the American colonies. The Irish in Ireland could not control their country's destiny or identity, and inequities based on class, wealth, origin, and faith were permeating and profound. Echoes of these negative perceptions and Irish resistance to them will be heard in our later discussion of Anglo-American responses to the massive Irish immigration in the mid-1800s. (For further information, see FitzGibbon, 1983; Foster, 1988, 1989; Greeley, 1972; McCaffrey, 1976).

The Irish Struggle to Maintain a Positive Identity

A third theme focuses on the cultural traditions and values maintained by the Irish despite their permanent inferior legal status and the almost total restraint imposed by the English on their educational and economic development. The Irish political personality was shaped by the ongoing confrontation with the anti-Catholic Penal laws. To achieve national independence, the Irish learned to compete within the context of the Anglo-Saxon political system. In 1792, Parliament amended the Code to allow Catholics to study law (although they were not allowed on the bench). Thus the courts where Irish lawyers could speak became the forum for protesting the larger issues of the society. Resources of wit and speech were used to challenge, albeit indirectly, the conqueror's legitimacy (Shannon, 1963). Many Catholic peasants also joined secret agrarian societies to protest high rents, tithes, and evictions since no recourse was available to them under Irish law (McCaffrey, 1976, p. 25).

The significance of and dependency on a tradition of oral history begun by the Celts was reinforced by the prohibitions on education enforced in the Penal Code. Gaelic language and literature were not taught in the Protestant schools, and the Irish bardic schools were suppressed. However, Gaelic language and history was transmitted orally within communities; bards continued to walk the land until 1835 (FitzGibbon, 1983); and itinerant schoolmasters (often friars or priests) taught the classics and Gaelic culture in what were called hedge schools (behind a hedge to avoid detection), though their work was limited and illegal.

Access to formal education was not entirely eliminated for Irish Catholics, however. During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many of those with means fled to Europe, Britain, or America to pursue their fortunes and/or obtain formal education. For example, Kirkham (1990) documents that theological colleges in Europe provided opportunities for the training of priests during periods of official repression of the Catholic church, and "in 1653 alone, more than a thousand (clerics) were said to have departed from Ireland" (p. 83). Many returned, but there were many who did not, "forming distinct Irish communities in seminaries and colleges throughout Europe" (p. 83). As FitzGibbon (1983) concludes. 'A respect, even a reverence for learning was part of the Irish tradition" (p. 251).

Faced with economic exploitation by a foreign landlord, failed rebellions, and blocked social and economic mobility, the Irish turned inward, emphasizing service and conformity to family and community expectations. Maintaining ownership of family land became a dominant goal of the family and an organizing principle for village life after the abolition of the Penal Codes and the grim experiences of the 19th century potato famines. In fact, this goal continued to be important in the 20th century as illustrated by the contemporary Irish film The Fields and the influential anthropological study conducted in the Irish countryside in the 1930s by Arensberg (1937/1968), who observed that in Ireland "one's blood calls to one's possessions. A particular ancestral line is inseparable from a particular plot of earth" (p. 86). Customs for preserving the family connection to the land included late marriages (which permitted parents to run the farm until "retirement"), the selection of only one son to inherit the land, the designation of only one daughter to receive a dowry, and the assignment of the other siblings to "travel" or remain as laborers on the farm.

In this value and social structure, Arensberg (1937/1968) claimed that the individual was seen as "a unit in a balance of human relationships" (p. 76) and that "saintliness . . . is a matter of filling a social role. . . . It is one's role for the community that counts" (p. 115). The entire family was interdependent in a system that was fundamentally built on self-restraint (Diner, 1983, p. 20). Individuals' needs and preferences were subordinated to the maintenance of the family and preserving the family's ownership of the land.

Of course, the rituals, traditions, and values of the Catholic church were enormously important to the maintenance of Irish identity during these difficult times, despite all the pressures and incentives applied by the English to support the

eradication of this faith. The church provided continuity with an honored past, opportunities for celebration and the continuous coming-together of the community, access to education, and justification for suffering.

As we will see, strong commitment to family and church, recognition of the power of the word and skill in its use, an investment in social justice, and a reverence for education are still important among Americans who claim Irish heritage today.

A Portrait of the Famine Irish

A fourth theme that we have identified as very important in understanding the Irish experience in America is the intensity of the Irish suffering during the Great Potato Famine and the extent of the English disregard for that experience. Several other countries reported the blight (Germany, Canada, Scotland, Belgium), but without the terrible effects that occurred in Ireland.

In the Irish countryside, the family was the unit of production and survival. An inheritance law of the Penal Codes specified that lands owned by Roman Catholics be divided equally among all sons, thus resulting in division of the land that remained to them into smaller and smaller lots. Many Catholics owned no land, but leased small plots from Protestant landowners in exchange for their labor. During the mid-1700s, tenant laborers were increasingly driven off the land as landlords found cattle production more profitable than farming, producing many itinerant laborers and beggars (see Flanagan's 1979 account The Year of the French, for a vivid description of the deteriorating conditions of the Catholic peasants prior to the rebellion of 1798). In order to produce enough food for their families on these small owned or leased plots, cultivation was confined largely to potatoes. Reliance on one crop made the Irish peasant family vulnerable: fourteen potato famines struck Ireland between 1816 and 1842. But dependence on the potato proved disastrous when a new fungus disease caused the potatoes to rot in the fields during the Great Potato Famine of 1845-1849 (Foster, 1988).

By 1846, disaster in the potato fields of Ireland was complete. Some 10 million tons of the crop, produced on 1.5 millions acres, was lost. A famine of unprecedented severity gripped the land, and the Irish fell prey to a variety of epidemic maladies. Between 1845 and 1850, one million Irish died. Paradoxically,

during those same years, two million quarters a year of wheat were shipped from Ireland (Greeley, 1972, p. 34). The Poor Relief Bill of that year stated that if small tenants gave up land to the landlords, they would receive assistance to emigrate. If they owned and occupied anything greater than 1/4 acre they would receive no relief, nor would their spouse or children. The law effectively cleared the land. In 1841, the population of Ireland had been close to eight million. A normal growth rate would have produced a population of 9.5 million by 1851. In fact, the population in 1851 was closer to 6.5 million. Approximately one million Irish died and 1.5 million emigrated (Greeley, 1972, p. 30).

The Irish died while the British government watched. The Viceroy in Ireland, whose appeal for help had been denied, stated "I don't think there is another legislature in Europe that would disregard such suffering or coldly persist in this policy of extermination." Sir Charles Wood, the English Chancellor of the Exchequer, cautioned: "We must not complain of what we really want to have happening: the overpopulation of Ireland solved by an act of nature, an affliction of God's providence." Or finally, from an economics professor at Oxford: "The famine will kill only one million and that will not do much good" (Greeley, 1972, p. 24).

Alexis de Tocqueville, an astute observer of life on both sides of the Atlantic, wrote in 1845: "All the rich Protestants in Dublin speak of Catholics with such extraordinary hatred and scorn. The latter, they say, are savages. There is nothing between all the luxuries of existence and the last degree of human wretchedness." The London Times rejoiced that "Soon a native Irishman will be as rare on the banks of Liffey as a red man on the banks of Manhattan." All throughout the famine, cartoons in English newspapers depicted Irish as "filthy, brutal creatures, assassins and murderers begging money under pretence to buy weapons of rebellion" (Greeley, 1972, p. 35).

Immigrants from this period of Irish history came to the United States with few reserves or skills. They were landless peasants, seasonal workers, unskilled urban workers who needed a quick entry into employment of whatever kind. To the English, who refused to redistribute land to ameliorate starvation, these Irish peasants were of no social value, and they moved from the lowest labor status in Ireland to the lowest labor status in industrial America. They made a choice to leave, but in this period, the decision to migrate was almost an involuntary one.

We have not attempted here to present a detailed history of Ireland, but rather to highlight what we found to be significant themes from Irish history that seem to reappear in the Irish experience in America. What seems most noteworthy is that until Ireland became an independent state in the 20th century, an "Irishman" was defined less by his own traditions and culture and more by external forces; first by English colonial legislation and then by the English media. Those definitions were reproduced in America. The Irish immigrants to America had to survive economically and then raise a challenge to the negative stereotypes that followed them to the new world.

PART II: THE IRISH IN AMERICA: THE ECONOMY DEFINES THE IRISH (1820-1865)

Although the focus of this paper is the development of Irish American identity and the strategies used to promote assimilation and achievement, that development took place against a backdrop of the harsh economic realities of the Industrial Revolution and the tensions of emerging nationalism in 19th century America. We will look briefly at the economic experience of the Irish immigrant and its contribution to the framing of an Irish identity in America.

Small numbers of Irishmen settled in America in the 17th and 18th centuries. They were quite skilled and economically successful; merchants and artisans with confidence and resources. Many were Protestants and Ulstermen of Scottish ancestry. Some Irish-American individuals and families of this period became prosperous and prominent. For example, Charles Carroll of Maryland was the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence and also the wealthiest. John Barry served in the revolution as the first navy Commander commissioned by the Continental Congress and became the "father of the American Navy." Benjamin Franklin received over 100 letters from the "Irish Wild Geese" (aristocrats fleeing from persecution in Ireland) volunteering for service in the Revolution. In 1790, out of a total population of 3 million, 44,000 claimed Irish birth, and another 150,000 claimed Irish ancestry (Shannon, 1963/1989).

The Famine Immigrants Occupy the Bottom of the Economic Ladder

As the economy of Ireland declined, however, the number of immigrants increased and their skills and resources declined. From 1841-1850, about 781,000 Irish came to America's shores. From 1851-1860, the number climbed to about 914,000. "Between 1820 and 1850, the Irish composed 42.3% of all American immigrants" (Fallows, 1979, p. 48). In 1860, the Irish were the single largest immigrant group in Boston, New York, Baltimore, and Cincinnati. Oscar Handlin in Boston Immigrants (1941) argues that the Irish famine refugees really had no choice but to settle in cities along the East Coast because they lacked both the funds to move west and the agrarian skills suited to the United States. The consequences were severe:

> An impoverished rural peasantry driven from the land by economic disaster, the Irish flocked to the Eastern cities, where they established their particular variant of the stem family closely tied to a special ethnic version of the Roman Catholic Church. Patriarchalism was regnant: women, once married, rarely worked outside the home, and the children, seen as economic assets, were expected to obtain jobs at an early age. Yet the stern family in Ireland had been rooted in an essential relationship with the land that was wholly lacking in America, with the result that Irish households suffered an unusual degree of strain during the early years in the new environment. (Cremin, 1988, p. 376)

The rise of the factory system during the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of the country's communication and transportation system created job opportunities for the "famine" Irish. But they were generally hired for unskilled labor, at the bottom of the economic ladder. They were hired for jobs which paid shockingly low wages: in 1846, an Irishman earned 50 cents for a 15-hour day (Archdeacon, 1983). At such wages, they were used to replace native workers in the textile mills of the Northeast. Many of the jobs available to them were also very dangerous. Irishmen provided much of the labor to build the nation's canals, railroads, and bridges, and Irish male workers experienced an extremely high rate of industrial accident and death in these jobs (Shannon, 1963). Families forced to cope with these disasters depended on children's labor for economic survival, and children left school to enter the factories or work in neighborhood establishments.

During most of the nineteenth century, economic advancement for unskilled Irish workers was difficult. Employers and want ads often explicitly stated that "No

Irish need apply," and semi-skilled and management jobs were reserved for natives. According to Williams (1990), the pattern of labor division into skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled jobs became a structural element integral to factory organization. This rigid division of labor promoted an ethnic hierarchy, as each succeeding immigrant group entered the work force on the lowest rung. The confinement of the Irish to the lower rungs of the labor market gave apparent legitimacy to the notion that the Irish were willing to work cheap because they had no desire to improve their condition. In fact, initially they had few employment options (Williams, 1990).

Irish females had a different work experience than either Irish males or females in other immigrant groups. They did not tend to move into unskilled factory jobs but were more likely to become live-in servants, often foregoing marriage and family. As servants, the women earned more than factory wages, and because they lived in their employer's home, were able to save some of their wages. Often this money was sent back to Ireland: in the 13-year period between 1848 and 1861, $60 million was sent back to Ireland to finance additional immigration, and to improve the standard of living of their families (Diner, 1983). O'Carroll (1990) explains that the pattern of "chain migration" (one immigrant paying the passage of another) was particularly strong among Irish-American women.

The relationships and perceptions that began with Irish employment on the lowest rung in the labor market were reflected and elaborated in the political environment of mid-19th century America, in the media, and in the ongoing conflict over Irish children's attendance in public school. Again we have an example of the power of definition. As we have seen, the Irish in Ireland were defined by the conquering English through the Penal Codes as second-class citizens. In America, the Irish immigrants were defined by their initial work experience in the expanding capitalism of mid-19th century America.

Formulating a Negative Stereotype: The Know-Nothing Party and the Media

Between 1800 and 1850, America experienced a great westward expansion. The nationalism and pride produced by this expansion were matched by the growing sectional tension and anxiety about the fragility of the union. As Americans tried to answer the question "What or who is an American?", they turned to race, religion, and political character as primary sources of national identity. As Bodnar (1990/1991) explains:

> . . . the discourse was dominated by powerful and persistent cultural variants of nationalism that ceaselessly sought to defend the nation against the threat of foreigners and the culture these newcomers brought, and it was articulated in language that depicted foreigners as threatening and harmful. (p. 82)

As thousands of Irish immigrants arrived in America in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, they became the "outsiders."

It is in this context that the speeches, campaigns, proposed legislation, and the xenophobic nativism of the Know-Nothing Party emerged. Initially an anti-Catholic secret society of the 1830s called the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner, it evolved into the Native American Party with chapters in 16 states. When members were asked about their goals and party principles, they simply pleaded ignorance, thus the popular name "the Know-Nothing Party." This nativist movement was a noisy and visible critic of European immigration and helped to create and perpetuate a negative stereotype of the Irish.

The Know Nothings talked directly of politics and religion. The Irishman was described as "ignorant, depraved, quarrelsome, impudent, swaggering, and riotous;" the result of low culture, squalid poverty and the despotism of their priests (Knobel, 1986, p. 131). The attacks were not only made on identifiable criminals, drunkards, or paupers, but were also applied to a much broader class of Catholic immigrants. Any and all who by the widest stretch of the imagination could be regarded as emissaries of "European Popery" were victimized in what has been described as a "war of ancestries" (Knobel, 1986, p. 139). "Domestication" was a favorite term used by the Know Nothings, who were adamant that the Irish had to surrender un-American habits and become American in feeling, thought, and devotion. The Know-Nothing Party platforms advocated laws to restrict immigration, extend the period of naturalization, and limit franchise and office holding; in effect, to institutionalize ethnic prejudice.

Many Americans were attracted to nativism as a method of controlling and reversing what they saw as the Irish urban blight, characterized by high rates of poverty, crime, and disease. The Know-Nothing Party responded to these fears and experienced great success in the 1854 and 1856 local and national elections in New York, New England, and California. In Massachusetts, the Know Nothings won the governorship and both houses of the legislature. By the 1856 presidential election, the sectional tension between the North and South dominated national politics, and

the Know Nothing candidate, Millard Fillmore, won 800,000 votes but lost the election. By 1860, the realignment of political loyalties had created the Republican party, which largely absorbed the Know Nothings.

Although the political organization of the Know Nothings faded, anti-Catholicism did not. Anti-Catholic zealots sought to institutionalize religious prejudice by rewriting the nation's naturalization oaths and requiring religious tests of candidates for public office. Immigration reforms sought to build standards of political conformity into the naturalization laws, proposed excluding all foreign-born from government office, and insisted on a homogenous society based on Anglo-Saxon, Protestant cultural values.

Irish background, Catholicism, and urban corruption melded in the American mind to create a sense of threat to traditional American virtues and values. Antagonism toward immigrants was a recurring pattern in the decades between 1840 and 1925, depending on economic, political, and psychological factors (Higham, 1988). This antagonism was reflected in categorical judgments and generalized hostility, which sometimes turned to violence. For example, in 1844, in response to the Bishop of Philadelphia's request for public funds for parochial schools, a Protestant mob burned homes and dynamited the Catholic churches. Archbishop John Hughes managed to prevent a similar occurrence in New York by surrounding churches and schools with armed Irish guards and threatening to counterattack if even one church was damaged (McCaffrey, 1976). While the political organization of the Know Nothings and certainly the violence against religious institutions did not involve a majority of Americans, the negative image of the Irish was conveyed in the media to a very wide audience, which in turn helped to shape public attitudes.

The mid-19th century in America was the age of the printed word. Americans "waged their political battles in newspapers, sought domestic advice from magazines, taught their children from primers, and evangelized with tracts" (Knobel, 1986, p. xiii). In a content analysis of the printed material available to the American public between 1840 and 1870, Knobel discerned patterns and images of the Irish; that is, the popular stereotype found in popular and widely circulated printed materials. Here again is another source of definition: not the English Penal Code, or the stereotypes associated with the first jobs of the Irish, or the strident language of the political campaign, but the images conveyed in popular culture.

What was the image of the immigrant Irish described in the popular media to and by Americans? The symbol of the Irish was Paddy, and Paddy represented "popery, poverty, and political corruption" (Knobel, 1986, p. 9). How were the Irish given identity? "Image making is collective rather than individual; the collective image of the abstract group grows up not by generalization from experience gained in close, first-hand contact, but through the transcending characterizations that are of the group as an entity." Thus, "stereotyping transpires in public and has a prescriptive impact upon individual perception" (Knobel, 1986, p. xii). The term "paddy wagon" as a synonym for police van dates from these times, stereotyping the Irish as the only likely candidates for arrest. Fraser (1979) summarizes this process: "As has so often happened in American history, the poor were blamed for all of the problems they faced. The Irish were seen as drunks; they were the ones arrested; they were the ones on the poor rolls" (p. 38).

A cartoon collection at the University of Michigan traces the image of the Irishman as it evolved in media over the last 120 years. In the early 1800s, "Paddy" was a rough, uncivilized-looking creature, but still distinctly human. By the mid-1800s, Paddy had become a gorilla, with a stovepipe hat, a shamrock in lapel, and a vast jug of liquor and large club in his hand. He also had a brutal, simple, stupid face. By the 20th century, the cartoon image had changed again. Now Paddy was a leprechaun, the subject of gentle fun rather than a crude and filthy monster (Greeley, 1972). These were the images from cartoons; the printed word repeated the themes and became a word portrait, a collection of adjectives applied over and over again to the Irish in Americans' ordinary conversation. Words represented attitudes and in turn shaped individuals' attitudes.

Clearly these images were not static. From 1820-1830, there was a close connection hypothesized between environment, nurture, character, and behavior. Behavior was linked to ethnicity but subject to reform. By implication, an American could be made (with difficulty) from Irish stock. By 1840, the stereotype in the popular literature had hardened and was less forgiving. Irishness was not something to be changed with a change in environment. Ethnology, the "science of human differences," entered the discussion and described a separate race, distinguished by "readily discernible features." Thus, physical characteristics became linked to inheritable patterns of character and behavior.

The Celtic race, it was argued, could "never be made to comprehend the meaning of the word liberty." Celtic blood contained "seeds of blight." Roediger (1991) documents that:

> Some suggested that the Irish were part of a separate caste or a 'dark' race, possibly originally African. Racial comparisons of Irish and Blacks were not infrequently flattering to the latter group. The Census Bureau regularly collected statistics on the nation's 'native' and 'foreign' populations, but kept the Irish distinct even from the latter group. (p. 133)

Gradually, character became a correlate of physique and national character a product of blood. Phrenology (a method of reading character from the contours of the skull) was increasingly popular during this period and argued that anatomical and physiological characteristics have a direct influence upon mental behavior (Knobel, 1986, p. 111). These faddish pseudosciences did much to harden the anti-Irish stereotype and to challenge the earlier optimistic beliefs in assimilation and homogeneity. While the validity of this "scientific thinking" was soon rejected, it is less clear that the popular assumptions which it helped to create were soon dismissed.

Schools Absorb and Maintain Negative Stereotypes about the Irish

The schools, too, reflected the social stereotyping of the larger society and thus education provided a persistent, fundamental, and emotional focal point in the many conflicts between nativists and Catholics. The story of how the schools responded to the large influx of Irish immigrants is a complex one, both for the Irish and the natives, with variations depending on era and location.

Generally, however, public schools received the Irish children with ambivalence, particularly in the major Eastern cities. On the one hand, the "common school" was seen as the primary agent for the civilization and assimilation of suspect immigrants. As Fraser (1979) summarized the argument for the common school: "Schools were the solution. They would bring everyone together, assimilate everyone, and make every Irish Catholic a good Yankee" (p. 39). As early as 1820, John Quincy Adams asserted the necessity of immigrant assimilation: "To one thing they must make up their minds, or they will be disappointed in every expectation of happiness as Americans. They must cast off their European skin, never to resume it." (Quoted in Schultz, 1973, p. 230). According to Samuel Bates, chairman of the School Visiting Committees for Boston during the early 1850s: "the object of the city

was to 'train up all the children, within its jurisdiction, to be intelligent, virtuous, patriotic, American citizens'" (Quoted in Schultz, 1973, p. 258). In 1863, Edward Everett insisted that we are "waging the great war against the legion hosts of ignorance, vice, and anarchy, not with cannons and Minie rifles, but with the spelling-book, the grammar, and the Bible!" (Quoted in Schultz, 1973, p. 260).

On the other hand, the public schools certainly did not treat poor Irish children with respect. As Ravitch (1974) explains the history of the New York City schools: "the public schools were reproachful, disapproving of their habits and their morality, disparaging their family, their religion, and their culture" (p. 33). She supports her findings with this quote from the New York City Board of education in 1831:

> The attention of the Board has been . . . directed to the necessity of a school near the "Five Points", in which neighborhood, there is a large number of children, alike destitute of literary and moral instruction; and who have been so long subjected to the influence of the worst examples that it is not thought proper to associate them with the respectable and orderly children who attend the Public Schools. (Trustees of the Public School 1831 Annual Report as quoted in Ravitch, 1974, p. 33)

Irish-American families sent their children to public schools with ambivalence. On the one hand, for Irish families who could afford to sacrifice the earning power of their children to send them to school, the institution offered their children the gateway to the opportunities of America, particularly when the schools had a reputation for excellence. As Sanders (1979) explains, "Despite their obvious distaste for the Yankees, the Irish felt a certain need, even without compulsory legislation, to enter through the public school door in hope of initiation into the great tradition and ultimate acceptance" (p. 60).

On the other hand, the public school could be a threatening environment for their children and the values of the family. As in Ireland, schools were designed to be agents of assimilation to Protestantism, an important component of the hoped for reformation of Irish children. The tradition of anti-Catholicism was probably nowhere worse than in Boston, where according to Sanders (1979):

> Until 1780, 150 years after its founding, Massachusetts denied freedom of worship to Catholics. Not until 1820 could Catholics hold public office. Until 1833 tax monies went to the support of Protestant churches. Until 1862

> the public schools officially taught Protestantism. . . . As late as 1905 church spokesmen fought for legislation to safeguard the religious beliefs of Catholic orphans. (p. 46)

Throughout the nineteenth century, Catholic parents protested the required recital of Protestant prayers in the public schools, use of the King James version of the Bible, and teaching from textbooks which presented vehemently anti-Irish versions of history. Clerics were afraid that the schools were not only anti-Catholic but physically dangerous, as Father John Talbot Smith asserted at mid-century: "The children in the common school were neglected by the Protestant teachers; and often beaten by the scholars out of pure malevolence, whether Irish born or of Irish parents, or remotely of Irish blood, and their blood mattered nothing if they were Catholics" (Smith, 1905, p. 131, quoted in Weisz, 1976, p. 97). As we shall see later, one solution to parental and clerical ambivalence was the development of a parallel system of parochial schools.

Many scholars have made the point that the model for schooling that was introduced into American society during the last half of the nineteenth century tried to replicate the factory model and in so doing maintained inequities of class and occupational mobility. As Schlechty (1991) puts it:

> During the period following the Civil War, . . . another concept of schooling gained a significant following. In this emerging view, the purpose of schools was thought to be to Americanize the immigrant child, and to select, sort, and standardize students according to their ability to fit into the urban factory system. (p. 17)

He continues:

> In this vision, students are viewed as products to be molded, tested against common standards, and inspected carefully before being passed on to the next workbench for further processing. And because students were . . . viewed as products of schooling, they were viewed as bringing the basic raw material to schools. The quality of this raw material -- the student's aptitude for succeeding in the college preparatory curriculum -- is, of course, determined primarily by family background. . . . (p. 22)

Both in England and in America, similar processes were used to confine the education and development of the Irish. Both in America and in England, the

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preservation of the Irish in the lowest rungs of the working class served a useful purpose. In England, the Irish supplied labor for agriculture and the land supplied wool and lumber to fuel English industries (Fallows, 1979). In America, as we have seen, the Irish were needed to occupy the most dangerous and unskilled roles in the expanding manufacturing and transportation systems (Miller, 1985). Although exhorted and later compelled to attend the common school, as a general rule, poor Irish Catholics in public schools were exposed to education that rejected their language, culture, and religion. When public schools ignored those children who were too poor to continue in school (Fraser, 1979), school leaders failed to acknowledge that reality and blamed the poor for their continued ignorance. Denied access to skilled employment in some major cities of America and to the acquisition of land and wealth in England, the Irish were then berated for their poverty, filth, and violence. As the crowning irony, it seems that these negative attitudes and actions toward the Irish were then justified based on the Irish worker's limited occupational mobility.

In exploring the Irish experiences with schools, the Know-Nothing Party, the media, and employment during the middle of the 19th century, we have tried to illustrate the hardening of an Irish stereotype. What is striking is that the negative stereotype of the early years, based so much on economic status, continued and was reinforced in the charged political debate of the Know Nothing movement, the pervasive media attention given to the discussion of whether Irish could be Americans, and in actions of teachers and other school officials toward the children of the Irish. What we note in the following sections is that the Irish, as their economic position began to shift, gathered resources to create an Irish definition of the Irish that challenged directly the negative stereotype, and that in that process they both found and lost their Irishness.

PART III. THE IRISH ATTEMPT TO DEFINE THEMSELVES, (1865-1930)

> "'Tis a big question," said Mr. Dooley, "an wan that seems to be worryin' th' people more thin it used to whin ivry boy was designed f'r the priesthood, with a full undherstandin' be his parents that th' chances was in favor iv a brickyard. Nowadays they talk about th' edycation iv' the child befure they choose th' name. 'Tis: 'Th'kid talks in his sleep. 'Tis th' fine lawyer he'll make'." (Dunne, 1900, p. 243)

The next two sections explore the shift in definition of the Irish in America, from the status of an inferior, despised, and exploitable race to levels of academic and economic achievement among the highest in America. In this section, we will explore the tools that Irish-Americans adapted and developed that facilitated the creation of their new identity: control of local politics, the use of community and voluntary organizations to support the integration of new Irish-Americans, the development of parallel social structures, and the creation of parochial schools as alternatives to public education. As in the first two sections, we are again aware that there is no single story to be told, but many stories, depending on where the Irish settled in America, the influence of contemporary economic and political trends in Ireland and America, and the interactions between these macroforces and individual and family experiences.

The Data

Historians of the Irish-American immigration experience have documented that the period between 1865 and 1925 was a period of transition from poverty to respectability (Archdeacon, 1983; Fallows, 1979; Miller, 1985; Perlmann, 1988; Sanders, 1979; Shannon, 1966). Consider these two summaries:

> By the early 1900's, the American Irish as a group were in transition from the position of new immigrants, disparagingly called "shanty Irish" by Yankees of the mid-1800's, to a position of middle-class "lace-curtain" respectability. Although the transition was marked by increasing numbers of individual successes, as those of longer residence or personal enterprise moved into positions of financial, political, and social prominence, it was largely a group phenomenon -- a product of the settling in of the second- and third-generation descendants of the early famine immigrants, who now came to regard themselves, and to be regarded, as acculturated members of an American mosaic. (Fallows, 1979, p. 45)

> The Irish, in short, stood at the opening of the twentieth century with a foot in each world. The desire to join the "ins" conflicted with the desire to lead the "outs." The wish to climb socially ran counter to the impulse to champion the rebellious, restless poor. The options for individual Irishmen were numerous: conventional success or frustrated insurgency, individual assimilation or the chauvinism of the Irish community, bleached out respectability or labor radicalism. . . . They had come a long way in seventy years. They knew they still had a long way to go. (Shannon, 1969, p. 145)

An excellent example of the careful documentation and analysis of the rising educational achievement and occupational attainment of the Irish during this period is found in Perlmann's examination of the Irish experience in Providence, Rhode Island from 1880-1935. (Also see Emmons, 1989; McCaffrey, Skerrett, Funchion, & Fanning, 1987; Meagher, 1986; Peterson, 1976; Thernstrom, 1973). From 1880-1925, the amount of schooling received by Irish children in Providence increased steadily: in 1880 almost none of the Irish immigrants reached high school (2.1% of sons of Irish immigrants vs. 23.7% of the sons of Yankees; 3.9% of Irish daughters vs. 32.4% of Yankee daughters). But by 1925, 73.5% of the sons of Irish immigrants enrolled in high school as compared with 61.5% of the sons of native whites. Although the Irish were concentrated in working-class occupations, there was also a steady rise into skilled and white-collar occupations during this period, with a noticeable improvement across generations. Perlmann (1988) summarizes: "The second-generation Irish reached the mean score for all fathers' occupations in the city by 1900 and passed it by 1915; the immigrant generation reached it in 1925" (p. 45).

Perlmann draws three provocative conclusions. First, there were important differences between Irish immigrant and Yankee status in the nineteenth century and the differences could be only partly explained by class and family background variables: ethnic differences remained even when these sources of variance were controlled. He suggests that Irish ethnicity was probably connected to lesser levels of achievement because of continued discrimination against Irish workers and the persistent influence of pre-migration cultural heritage on the Irish family. That is, even by 1880, about half of the Irish immigrants were still illiterate; (by 1900, that number was reduced to one-fourth). Moreover, borrowing from Kerby Miller (1985), he speculated that pre-migration Irish heritage might continue to shape Irish-American family values regarding success, resulting in a fatalistic orientation, a communal rather than an individualistic orientation, dependence, and an inclination to be passive and respectful of authority. Perlmann's third important finding is, of course, that these patterns changed by the twentieth century. Some of the factors that he assumed were responsible for the shift included the continued educational and economic development of the Catholic Irish in Ireland; the relative stability and acculturation of the Irish immigrants in relation to the new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe; and the rising influence of the Irish in city government which led to some control of job appointments.

All of these themes require further elaboration, but two areas deserve special attention as we relate this history to our current effort to understand how children from various ethnic groups can attain educational and occupational success in the twenty-first century. One theme is **how** the Irish gained political influence and social respectability after 1860. A second is how the family functioned as an influence in this process.

Is Geography Destiny?

The numbers of Irish who came to American shores were enormous: in the decade from 1841-1850, the Irish constituted 45.6% of the total immigration to the United States; in the decades from 1861-1900, the percentage gradually declined from 18.8% to 10.5%. Between 1911 and 1920, there was a further drop to 2.5% or 146,181 individuals. Most of these immigrants settled in the Northeast. As late as 1900, 60% were still living in just six states -- New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island (Perlmann, 1988). But throughout the period, about a third could be found in other areas in the country, especially in the expanding Mid-West and along the Pacific coast (Blessing, 1985).

Several authors have suggested that one very important factor in the occupational and educational attainment of the Irish during this period was where they chose to settle (Clark, 1986; Emmons, 1989; Greeley, 1989; Handlin, 1959; Miller, 1990; Wittke, 1956). For example, Fallows (1979) contrasts the opportunities for the Irish in New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, and Stamford, Connecticut. Philadelphia was welcoming for several reasons: at the time of the famine immigration, the city was entering a period of rapid expansion. A "broad-based industrial center, a thriving port, and the hub of an expanding rail network" (p. 34-35), Philadelphia provided for its new and old Irish citizens (21% of the population of the city in 1850) many options for skilled and unskilled work, fairly easy access to home ownership because of a residential building boom, and the opportunity to gain social skills and raise capital by participating in "integrated" social organizations and building and loan associations.

In Boston, where the Irish constituted 31% of the population in 1850, Fraser (1979) asserts:

> While other American cities received a variety of immigrants and Western cities received their European and American citizens at the same time, Boston was unique. Here a long-established native population received immigrants of one ethnic group which became cohesive in its own ways. Trouble was inevitable. (p. 38)

Work opportunities were primarily for unskilled workers (textile factories and railroad construction) with little possibility of upward mobility. Because the physical layout of the city prevented expansion and the Irish stayed poor, "South Boston emerged as an urban slum, a congested and frightening district soon deserted by native Americans" (Fallows, p. 37). The hostility of the Boston Brahmins to the Irish-Americans and the persistent lack of access to integrated social organizations or business opportunities created a ghetto setting and an oppositional culture that continues to some extent today -- "The exception rather than the rule in Irish experience" (Fallows, p. 42).

As a third example, consider the Irish experience in the Far West:

> At a time when hundreds of thousands of Irish were packed in the slums of Boston's North End and New York's East Side and were looked down upon as laborers and kitchen help, other Irish of identical background were amassing millions from the Comstock Lode and the Montana copper mines, running the governments of Nevada and California, and setting the social tone of San Francisco's Nob Hill. The Irish who went to California proved the adage, "The longest way round is the shortest way home." (Shannon, 1989, p. 86)

Shannon provides many examples of Irish who were prominent in the development of San Francisco, including this tale:

> No important fortunes were made by Irishmen in the (California) goldfields, but in the development of San Francisco they were in the forefront. Peter Donahue, recently arrived from Ireland, foresaw the need for a gas lighting system. He organized a company, imported pipe from the East and coal from Wales, and constructed San Francisco's streetlights. When the lights were turned on for the first time, the city staged a civic celebration. Donahue also established the city's first iron foundry, owned a steamboat line, and organized the San Jose Railroad. He built a mansion in downtown San Francisco and provided his wife with the perfect Cinderella gift: a coach made entirely of glass. At his death he left an estate of $4,000,000. (p. 87)

The most important lesson from this brief analysis is that even the aggregate experience of a given ethnic group within a given time period depends to some degree on the specific destination of members of that group, with upward mobility influenced by the economic opportunities, the physical characteristics of the city, and the permeability of the social structure in the receiving site.

Local Politics

The Irish used their large numbers to advantage in gaining control of local politics during this period in most major cities of the Northeast and Midwest. McCaffrey (1985) claims that "By the 1890s the Irish commanded the urban wing of the Democratic party" (p. 175). The process by which they ascended to power was new to America:

> Politically the Irish began in America as a batallion of voters. They fought Whigs and later Republicans with fists as well as ballots. Sometimes in the guise of volunteer fire companies Irish street gangs protected Democrats on the way to the polls and tried to stop non-Democrats from voting. . . . Serving in the ranks of the Democratic party was a short-term Irish expedient. Slowly but surely they took control of their own neighborhoods, building mini-organizations within the general party and ascended from precinct or ward captain to aldermen without surrendering direction of local units. In their drive for political power, the Irish built on Catholic solidarity and used saloons as political clubs and police and fire department appointments and city jobs as patronage sources to recruit workers and voters. (McCaffrey, 1985, pp. 174-175)

According to Shannon (1963, 1989), the Irish immigrant brought to politics advantages other immigrants did not have: knowledge of the English language, familiarity with the Anglo-Irish culture, "gifts of organization and eloquence, a sense of cohesion, and the beginnings of a political tradition in the nationalist agitation of Ireland" (p. 60). He argues that the Irish were successful in wresting political control from the industrial establishment after the Civil War both because the theory and practice of politics was at a "peculiarly low ebb" (p. 60) and because the Irish immigrants voted as a bloc for services and jobs which their own leaders promised and provided.

These traditions of obligation and taking care of one's family and neighbors were adapted from long Irish tradition. As Arensberg (1937; 1968) explained Irish

country life: "a favorable decision or a necessary public work was interpreted as a favor given. It demanded a direct and personal return. 'Influence' to the countryman was and is a direct, personal relationship, like the friendship of the countryside" (p. 161). In the classic (fictional) account of a ward boss in Boston in 1890, Dineen (1936) describes the personal and potent nature of the political exchange:

> He was respected because he assured the members of the clan their livelihoods. He was feared because he could deprive them of work instantly. . . . He furnished bail for craps-shooters, drunks, and minor criminals, and donated the largest sums to churches and religious causes. He was indispensable in arranging for dances and social functions. . . . Hughie could deliver the Irish vote in toto, and he did it annually to the highest bidder. (p. 22-23)

Once having obtained political power, the Irish-Americans were very effective in using political control as a vehicle for correcting discrimination, expanding city services, and securing modest gains in upward social mobility for their community. As explained by Shannon:

> The earliest leaders organized the Irish voters as a battering ram to break the power of a hostile majority. They put an end to elementary forms of discrimination such as the exclusive use of the King James Bible in the schools and the assignment of Protestant chaplains to Catholic inmates of hospitals, jails, and charitable institutions. Next, they fought for the appointment of Irish as schoolteachers and as policemen and firemen. Finally, they sought to take all political power into their own hands. (1989, p. 63)

We should not underestimate the effect that the recruitment of Irish-American teachers had on the educational achievement of Irish-American children in the public schools. Perlmann (1988) assesses the potency of this shift in the schools of Providence, Rhode Island:

> Changes were palpable at the level of the classroom. Less than 4% of the public school teachers in 1880 were children of Irish immigrants; by 1908, almost a quarter were, and many more must have been granddaughters of the immigrants by then. It is hard to judge whether so many teachers were of Irish background because the increasing political power of the Irish made their appointment possible or simply because, given the city's ethnic composition (42% of the children were of Irish heritage), Irish girls would in any case have constituted a large fraction of those entering teaching. . . .

> In short, it is reasonable to suppose that by 1900, the Irish were keeping their children in school longer because by that time they felt more comfortable with the public schools. They felt more comfortable, in turn, because the bitter feelings between them and the Yankees had diminished, because they exerted more control over the schools than they had formerly, and because their own daughters were now heavily represented among the teachers. (pp. 55-56)

For immigrant children to do well in school, families must confer legitimacy on the school, believing that teachers are committed to their child's success and will not undermine essential values of the home. As Erickson explains, ". . . the legitimacy of the school and its teachers, affirmed at the existential level as trust by individual students, is essential if deliberate instruction is to succeed in its aims" (1987, p. 345). As the Irish gained positions on city councils and school committees, and as their daughters joined the ranks of the teaching force, the family's connection to schooling increased, and the need to seek alternative schooling decreased.

Voluntary Organizations

The Irish immigrants who came during the famine years were aided in their assimilation by a broad range of voluntary organizations, some of which were founded by the Scotch-Irish and Anglo-Irish, and some of which were composed mainly of Anglo-Americans. The Irish voluntary organizations served many purposes: "charitable, fraternal, social, nationalist, cultural, educational, rural settlement" (Funchion, 1983, p. viii). Wealthy Protestant Irish established the oldest Irish organizations such as the Charitable Irish Society of Boston (1737) and the Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick in New York City (1783). During the famine immigration, new organizations were founded, such as the Irish Emigrant Society (1841) whose purpose was to give advice and information to immigrants, help them find jobs, and protect them from swindlers (Funchion, 1983). According to Light (1985), these "ethnic organizations and institutions were founded, staffed, and financed by those elements of the immigrant population that were most successfully integrated into American social and economic systems" (pp. 114-115).

They also performed a very important socializing function for immigrants without common experiences in this country. Light (1985) explains:

> Throughout the country ethnic organizations and institutions proliferated and gave direction and ideological coherence to a gradually emerging Irish

consciousness. They provided opportunities for interaction among like-minded individuals; they established standards of behavior and belief that defined and set members of the ethnic community off from the larger population; and they promulgated specific goals and programs that gave direction to a developing sense of ethnic solidarity.

> Ethnic institutions and organizations were indispensable to the development of a separate Irish ethnic consciousness in nineteenth-century America, but, paradoxically, . . . they also embodied many values commonly associated with the dominant Protestant culture. Members of ethnic associations were exhorted to be diligent, temperate, patriotic, and thrifty, to submit to civil authority, to educate themselves and their children, to adopt clean and orderly personal habits, and to be devout Christians. In other words they were urged to adopt the standards of behavior and belief associated with exponents of the Protestant work ethic and industrial discipline. Ethnic organizations thus separated their adherents from the dominant culture while at the same time assimilating them to many of the most important elements of that culture. (p. 114)

Light concentrated his research on the important role of Irish-American organizations in Philadelphia, a city which as we have already seen was quite receptive to the Irish immigrants. In this expanding city, he noted a three-tiered associational structure. At the top were the status-defining organizations composed of the "leading men" of the period. The second tier of Irish literary societies attracted younger men on their way up. These literary societies were especially interesting in the context of this review because of their educative function. Members participated in debating clubs, lyceums, lectures, dramatic presentations, and balls. The third tier provided an array of social and economic services to men "on the ragged edges of middle-class respectability" (p. 122). Light also identifies a fourth level of association which was participation in the volunteer fire companies. These associations were not respectable because of "their reputation for violence and defiance of centralized authority" (p. 122), but they were very important in cementing neighborhood alliances. These several ways of defining Irish ethnic community occurred in parallel with Irish participation in non-ethnic societies and organizations, participation which was enhanced by dispersion of the Irish throughout Philadelphia.

The Irish-American experience with volunteer organizations suggests another route for both the articulation of ethnic identity and assimilation into the dominant culture. The range of options and the extent of participation (tens of thousands during this era in Philadelphia) suggests the potential power of these organizations as socializing forces. The evolution of Irish voluntary organizations in parallel with

similar structures in the dominant culture provided a mechanism for socializing participants into the values and customs of the dominant culture. The theme of parallel structures as agents of assimilation will be further expanded in the next section.

Alternative Schools

A key factor in the achievement and upward mobility of the peasant Irish was the establishment of Catholic schools as alternatives to the public schools. As we noted in Part II, a great deal of evidence documented Yankee educators' hostility toward poor Irish-Catholic children (e.g., Fraser, Allen, and Barnes, 1979; Ravitch, 1974; Schultz, 1973; Weisz, 1976).

As early as 1829, the American Catholic leadership decided to establish parochial schools to help Irish Catholic children develop academically and maintain their faith. Yet the cost of building schools, the shortage of teachers, the continuing debate within the Church about the advisability of creating a separate school system, and the increasing numbers of Irish teachers in the public schools created sporadic implementation for decades. In 1884, the Third Council of Baltimore reaffirmed its commitment to parochial education, insisting on a parish school for every church. Moreover, the bishops insisted that families were "bound" to send their children to a parochial school unless excused by the bishop (Weisz, 1976). Opportunities for Catholic education (elementary through college) expanded after this period.

Different cities enrolled varying numbers of their Catholic children in parochial schools. In 1908, for example, percentages were: Boston, 26%; Cleveland, 71%; Newark, 76%; New York, 47%; and Philadelphia, 69% (Perlmann, 1988, p. 69). At the peak, about half of the Catholic children in the country were receiving education in Catholic schools (Fass, 1989).

From the perspective of our analysis of the relationship of achievement to ethnicity, the creation of Catholic schools as an alternative structure was a very important avenue for educational achievement and upward social mobility. According to Perlmann's analysis, for Irish youngsters from Providence, being enrolled in the parochial schools was more supportive of traditional academic success than enrollment in public schools: "Catholic high school students were more likely than those in the public institutions to enroll in college preparatory programs and

more likely to graduate from high school" (p. 76). Specifically, in 1915, three-fifths of the Irish-Americans who enrolled in Catholic high schools graduated, while only one-fifth of them succeeded in graduating from the public schools. These higher graduation rates existed even when family background characteristics were taken into account. Although the sample sizes are very small, it is instructive to note that the Irish children were also much more likely to be enrolled in a college preparatory course if they enrolled in the parochial school. In 1925, for example, about 90% of the Irish youngsters in the Catholic high school in Providence enrolled in the college preparatory course as compared with 75% of all those enrolled. In contrast, only about 27% of the Irish children in the public schools were in a college preparatory program as compared with about 50% of the total enrollment.

In trying to explain these differences, Perlmann (1988) notes the compatibility of these findings with recent studies of the academic advantages of private over public schools (Coleman, 1982; also see Chubb and Moe, 1990) and speculates that these differences in achievement may be explained by a higher level of commitment of students and families, higher expectations of teachers, a peer culture that is supportive of achievement, restrictive enrollments, and/or more flexible administration. In her review of the continuing academic orientation of Catholic high schools between 1920 and 1960, Fass (1989) also underlines the importance of selectivity as a factor in preserving an academic curriculum and thus providing greater access to upward social mobility for Catholic students.

It is interesting to note that the Irish Catholics did not use the school's curriculum to preserve the Irish language (Gaelic) or to teach Irish history, music, or literature (Fallows, 1979; Weisz, 1976). Since this heritage was emphatically not included in the Anglo-Protestant text and context of the public school, the formal transmission of this information was denied to students of Irish background in America as it had been in Ireland. Unlike other European immigrant communities of this period (Germans, Italians, Polish), the Irish did not use their alternative schools to maintain their Irish (as opposed to their Catholic) identity.

Why was this so? According to Weisz (1976), Irish nationalism did not spur more than sporadic parental advocacy for the teaching of Irish or Irish history in public or parochial schools. Irish-Americans were more concerned with developing an American identity which they saw as dependent on speaking one language. Their nationalism was reflected instead in their support of the Catholic church and in anti-

English positions. The Catholic hierarchy did not support teaching Irish in their schools because they felt it would overload the curriculum and limit their ministry to other Catholic groups in America. Thus, the study of Gaelic was limited to adult language classes offered by a few Irish societies, and exposure to written Irish occurred only occasionally in Irish-American newspapers and journals.

Macro- and Micro-Economics

> "But they rose . . . rose . . .
> like bonfires on a mountain
> every mansheila of them
> rose against the whip,
> broke files, made unions.
> It was a slow going
> a slow coming."
>
> from Exiles by Leland Bardwell, in O'Carroll (1990)

The Irish of this period were still predominantly working class and concentrated in the lower levels of the working class. Although as we have seen, there was definite evidence of upward mobility, families were often severely buffeted by local layoffs, national recessions and depressions (1875-6, 1893) and very difficult working conditions.

The Irish both responded to and transformed the economic conditions of these times. According to Clark (1985), their numbers stimulated demand for a wide range of goods and services; the thrift associations they founded contributed to the stability of the society; their involvement in construction helped to expand our great cities; their contributions in the West and Midwest uncovered valuable mineral resources; Irish names were legion in the development of unions and the improvement of working conditions. Moreover, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Irish "were part of a notable technical achievement that kept America in the forefront of material progress" (Clark, 1985, p. 241) and by 1900, 10% of the business elite were of Irish extraction.

Women migrated in greater numbers than men and contributed to the transformation by participating in the labor force and learning the skills necessary to move their families toward greater economic stability. In the book Erin's Daughters in America, Diner (1983) explains that the occupations to which women flocked, teaching and

domestic service, provided them with knowledge of the academic and social traditions of the dominant society. The Irish woman employed in domestic service "emerges as the civilizer of the Hibernians in their new home. . . . The American homes provided a school for the Irish women, a school where they could learn lessons that they would then pass on to their daughters, who might therefore be spared the necessity of being a Bridget" (p. 94).

It is difficult to track family influences on children's achievement during this period. We found no Irish-American ethnographies, and although Irish-American authors were writing prolifically during this period (Michael Downing, personal communication, 2/20/92), they were strangely silent about contemporary ethnic experiences. Fanning (1990), in his brilliant critique of Irish-American literature, describes the period from about 1900 to 1932 as "a generation lost" and a time of "cultural amnesia" (p. 238). Although there were great Irish-American writers of this period (e.g., F. Scott Fitzgerald), they did not write about their own heritage. Fanning hypothesizes that Irish-Americans excluded their ethnicity from their writing of fiction for several reasons: the negative reaction of the dominant culture to their anti-British stance during World War I; the negative perception of Irish nationalism after the Easter rebellion of 1916, and the continuing tenuousness of their drive toward middle-class respectability.

The long dry spell was broken with the work of James T. Farrell, who looked backward in time to chronicle the experiences of two working class Irish families in Chicago. According to Fanning (1990), Farrell's trilogy Studs Lonigan (1935, 1978) and his five additional volumes describing the O'Neill family contributed to the development of the self-image of the Irish by creating a voice for the inarticulate that could convey the "heart's speech" and describe the tragedy of the worker. All eight novels are set in a South Side neighborhood of Chicago between 1900 and 1930, Farrell's own childhood neighborhood. It is Danny O'Neill, who is a minor character in the Studs trilogy but the autobiographical hero of the other five volumes, who illustrates the possible escape of the artist and intellectual from working-class life. Danny is exposed through his parochial school education to intellectual models, and his academic and artistic gifts are encouraged both by his teachers and the culture of the church that offers him "a sense of order, of historical continuity, and of mystery . . . that inspire him to harness his imagination with words" (Fanning, 1990, p. 265). Danny goes to college and becomes a writer, inspiring pride in his grandmother for his scholarship and poetry.

Other authors, such as Edward McSorley and Mary Doyle Curran, also wrote autobiographical novels keyed to particular regions of the country and to the time period of 1900-1930. These authors also provide suggestive insights into the family dynamics and attitudes toward achievement that characterized families during this transition. For example, in the novel Kitty, I Hardly Knew You, Edward McSorley (1959) depicts the despair experienced by a young man whose dreams of love and success have been shattered by hard times:

> The times were keyed to vengeance, the myths collapsing. Men were hungry for food to keep them alive, thirsty for faith to sustain them, the children hungry. There was little food and little faith. The homes were smashed, the furniture thrown into the street, the gilt-framed picture of the wedding day piled into the rickety crib. (p. 213)

In The Parish and the Hill, Curran (1948, 1986) offers a poignant reflection on the sacrifice of the heroine's oldest brother to the family's needs during an extended period of desperate economic times. Eddie is a brilliant young man who shapes his little sister's intellectual gifts by talking to her

> . . . about the great imagination of the Irish and their wonderful speech. He referred constantly to a mysterious Book of Kells, talked with great excitement of the culture of the Irish in the old days, and how, if he had lived then, he might have been a great scholar. He told me of his great curiosity as a boy and how, there being no books to learn from, he would take books from the public library and copy from them the poems and stories he liked, to have something to read. He had copied complete the whole of two volumes of Irish history. (p. 134)

But Eddie was not able to go to college. "All his teachers, everyone who knew him, said he was brilliant and should have training; but there was no money. . . . Eddie became one of the main supports of the family. 'He is being sacrificed like the first-born of every Irish family,' my mother used to say, sacrificed as she too had been sacrificed" (p. 198). Eddie's mother encouraged his gifts and struggled to secure a job for him in a library, but others' connections were stronger, and Eddie became cruel and embittered as he spent year after year in jobs that stripped him of power and dignity.

For the Irish in America, the process of defining themselves as Americans was a torturous one. There was much to leave behind that felt precious and much to accept in the new world that seemed unpalatable (see Miller, 1985; Miller and

Boling, 1990-1991; O'Connell, 1985). Halley (1986) suggested that the Irish of the 1930s worried that: "Middle-class ideology, crass competitiveness, money and status values, a threatening Irish-American form of fascism . . . may be replacing the integrity, the human caring, of the older community" (p. 224). The struggle to find and keep a job in the rapidly-changing economy of this period, combined with the quest for respectability in a society that was largely contemptuous, bleached out some of the colorful eccentricity and humor of the Irish. There were many who could not conform, and the Irish of this period suffered from the highest rates of alcoholism and mental illness of any ethnic group in America. The Catholic church was a source of inspiration to scholars and clerics and of upward mobility through its parochial schools, but it was also the source of "rigid religious controls over morals and conduct" (Fallows, 1979) and consistent prescriptions for "moderation in economic ambitions" (McDannell, 1986). In many families of the era, information about personal and ethnic histories was not shared or sought by children in the quest for assimilation. For these first and second generation Irish-Americans, much had to be left behind for the dream of family security and advancement.

PART IV. LOSING THE HYPHEN: IRISH-AMERICANS BECOME AMERICANS

Academic and Economic Achievement

In the decades after the depression, Irish-Americans gained steadily in educational and economic advancement. By the 1971 Current Population report, Irish-Americans matched or slightly exceeded the national average on such measures as education, income, and occupation. As Fallows (1979) summarizes:

> In the 25 to 34 age group, the median number of school years completed was 12.6, compared with the national median of 12.2, whereas for the 35 and over age group it was identical with the national median of 12.0. . . . The employment status of Irish males over 16 showed 29.6 percent in high-level white collar jobs (managerial and professional) compared with 28.2 percent nationally. For women, 20.7 percent were in these kinds of jobs, compared with 18.7 percent nationally. (p. 63)

A lingering stereotype about the Irish is that their Catholic heritage has negatively affected their academic aspirations and productivity, because it has

supported the unquestioning acceptance of authoritarian positions. There is a stereotype, sometimes presented as fact, that Irish-Americans in particular and Catholics in general have not distinguished themselves as scholars, scientists, and academicians (see Sowell, 1988). Steinberg (1981) tackles "the myth" of Catholic anti-intellectualism by presenting data documenting that in terms of their numbers in the general population, by 1974 Catholics had achieved parity with Protestants in their representation among college faculty in this country and almost achieved parity in their representation among the faculty of our most prestigious academic institutions.

He noted that Catholic faculty differed from Protestant and Jewish faculty in their social class origins, with almost twice as many Catholic faculty identifying their family background as working class. Steinberg concludes that "Given the disadvantages with which Catholic immigrants started life in America, it is not surprising that they required another generation or two to produce their numerical share of scholars and scientists" (p. 148). He notes that what held back Catholic achievement in the earlier decades of the 20th century was not lack of value placed on education and achievement, but economic opportunity. Moreoever, he argues that the higher initial academic achievement of Jews was not due to ethnic values but "social class advantages in the form of literacy and occupational skills, that resulted in more rapid economic mobility" (pp. 138-139).

From Steinberg's perspective, class theory is a more persuasive explanation of levels of educational attainment than ethnic theory: "the class theory . . . holds that economic mobility occurred first, and that this opened up channels of educational opportunity and engendered a corresponding set of values and aspirations favorable to education" (1985, p. 132). From this perspective, what cemented Irish-American contributions to academic discovery was not a change in their valuing of education and inquiry, but the increased availability of scholarships and loans to finance higher education that began after World War II.

Contributions to Improved Status

Certainly economic opportunity played a key role in Irish-American achievement. So, as we have seen, did the many strategies that the Irish used to shape their experiences in the United States when obstacles stood in their way, which included

gaining access to political power, creating alternative schools, and using volunteer organizations to promote upward mobility.

As succeeding waves of immigrants came to America's shores in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Irish were relatively advantaged by their stability, large numbers, language facility, and "Western" background. White skin was also an advantage, as African Americans became the primary targets of discrimination and racism during this era. As America constructed its typology of what it meant to be Black or white and American, the distinctions among white cultures became less important, and the belief that the Irish were a separate, lesser race was forgotten.

An important literature has developed which documents the process by which this oppositional construction of "Blackness" and "Whiteness" occurred (see, e.g., Ignatiev, 1992; Morrison, 1989; Roediger, 1990; Williams, 1990). One might logically expect Irish Americans of this period to identify with African Americans. Their relatives in Ireland did: led by Daniel O'Connell, the Irish in Ireland were strongly opposed to black slavery, as evidenced by the collection of 70,000 signatures on an anti-slavery address and petition in 1842. Roediger (1992) argues that prior to 1841, Irish-American responses to abolition were mixed, and there were many examples of solidarity between African and Irish Americans in Northern cities based on common interests, somewhat parallel histories, and shared living and working spaces. In fact, when the anti-slavery petition was brought to Faneuil Hall from Ireland on January 28, 1842, the largely Irish crowd was enthusiastic.

However, in what these historians see as a turning point in the history of American race relations, Irish Catholic leadership moved immediately to crystallize Irish-American opposition to solidarity by publishing articles in Irish-American and Catholic newspapers casting doubt on the authenticity of the petition, raising strenuous objections to foreign interference in American affairs, and associating abolitionism with British interests (Ignatiev, 1992). Roediger (1991) contends that the rejection by Irish Americans of identification with their black brethren was supported by many additional factors, including the proslavery and white supremacist orientation of the Democratic party between the Age of Jackson and the Civil War; the willingness of the Democratic leaders to include the "wild Irish" in their definition of whiteness; job competition with Blacks who "could be victimized with efficacy" (p. 148) and a desire to distance themselves from "nigger work" (p. 150);

and a psychological need to project and then viciously reject "the anxieties and desires regarding relationships to nature and sexuality" (p. 151) that the Irish immigrant struggled with and Blacks came to epitomize.

Further contributions to the improved status of Irish Americans were related to improved conditions in the Republic of Ireland during the 20th century, leading to the gradual diminution of the stigma attached to Irish origins. Some of these improvements included winning independence from England; the Irish literary renaissance that brought the world brilliant authors such as Joyce and Yeats; the reformation of Irish educational practices and the admission of Catholics to Trinity College, leading to outstanding examples of educational achievement and academic productivity among the Irish Catholic population (see especially Coolahan, 1981; and Mulcahy and O'Sullivan, 1989); and the entry of Ireland into the European Common Market.

To avoid over-simplification, it is also necessary to note undercurrents in 20th century Irish history that may create some ambiguity about claiming one's Irish heritage. "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland which have fostered decades of violence and suffering have yet to be resolved. The economic and political status of the Irish in relation to their European neighbors is confused. As the hero explained in the recent movie The Commitments, "The Irish are the Blacks of Europe." Concern about identifying with the Irish may be underscored by the continuing economic struggles in Ireland, a country whose GNP is the lowest in the European community and that cannot consistently provide its young people with jobs; a country that as Hayes (1990) explains, sends away about as many people as are born there each year. Hayes ponders over the psychological effect of this view of emigration: "If the best were seen to be abroad, it didn't do much for the morale of those who remained. . . . In a Darwinian sense it was survival of the weakest" (1990, p. 16).

Americans, Irish Americans, or European Americans?

A fundamental question of this paper is whether individuals of Irish-American heritage continue to identify with that heritage in recognizable ways. Some individuals of Irish ancestry do not. In a recent study designed to clarify ethnic identification, about 20% of the sample of unmixed Irish ancestry described themselves as simply American (Alba, 1990). Certainly from some perspectives, assimilation is complete: the hyphen should be dropped. For example, Irish studies

as a formal focus of scholarship has a tenuous tradition in America (Clark, 1991). Discrimination against Irish-Americans appears to be a problem of the past (Alba, 1990). Irish-American children are rarely aware of Irish history or Irish-American history (Genova, 1981). The Irish language -- a central component of national identity for most peoples -- is a disappearing language. As we have seen, it was banished in Ireland under the English, never taught in American schools, and survives now in Irish schools not as a living language but a dead one (Lee, 1989).

However, most Irish Americans **do** identify with their heritage. In lengthy interviews with 524 randomly chosen residents of the Albany-Schenectady-Troy area in 1984-85, Alba (1990) discovered that about two-thirds of those with Irish ancestry did identify with their heritage, and of these, half considered their ethnic background to be of at least moderate importance. But Alba's view of what this ethnic identification means for the Irish as well as for other white European Americans is very provocative.

His point of view is that the meaning of ethnic identification is in the process of changing. First, he recognizes that continuing, pronounced demographic changes have hastened the process of assimilation for descendants of white Europeans over the last several decades. His data show that mixed and complex ancestry, membership in fourth and later generations, movement out of ethnic neighborhoods, large-scale social mobility, and uncertainty about ethnic background have contributed to decreased ethnic identification. To illustrate, for his Irish sample, Alba discovered that only 10.9% of the cohort born after 1950 married individuals of unmixed Irish ancestry. Of those who identified themselves as Irish in the sample, two-thirds were themselves of mixed ancestry. But despite these trends, he did not find that ethnicity was being eliminated. Surprisingly, higher levels of education were associated with a moderately higher probability of expressing an ethnic identity, and "younger individuals were in some ways more interested in their ethnic backgrounds than their elders" (p. 307).

Based on data that indicated that ethnic background did not limit marriage choices, constrain friendships, or relate to political concerns, Alba speculates that an ethnic identity today is simply a form of cultural capital, useful in establishing relationships in a socially mobile society. His thesis is that the meaning of ethnicity is in the process of transformation to a merely symbolic commitment which he

defines as "the desire to retain a sense of being ethnic, but without any deep commitment to ethnic social ties or behaviors" (p. 306).

From Alba's perspective, ethnic identity is characterized primarily by participation in visible (and non-controversial) cultural features such as food preference, customs, and festivals. He argues that ethnic characteristics are no longer developed through membership in close-knit ethnic communities or even by deliberate family transmission. For example, he found that only about one-third of the parents who identified themselves as Irish were concerned that their children have some form of ethnic identity, apparently because parents believed that ethnic identity was "ultimately a matter for the children to decide" (p. 301). He concludes that ethnic identification is now "in all its ramifications, a choice by an individual; . . . choice is probably the key to unlocking the full implications of the transition underway from community to identity as a basis of ethnicity among whites" (p. 303).

Alba argues that the long-run outcome of ethnic change among whites is likely to be a new ethnic group which he calls "European whites," that would honor common aspects of immigrant history, serve common interests, and reflect the fact that patterns of discrimination and objective differences in education, work, family, and community have largely disappeared among white Americans of European ancestry.

A third point of view in the literature asserts that Irish ethnicity is neither disappearing nor transforming, but continues to be deeply influential in contributing to a recognizable Irish-American identity composed of character traits, behaviors, and beliefs. This perspective celebrates Irish Americans as a group that has maintained its ethnic identity through generations of repeated community change. Clark (1991) represents this point of view by presenting a contemporary portrait of "Erin's heirs" in Irish neighborhoods in Philadelphia and reviewing literature from other sections of the country which supports his analysis. Although he admits that the Irish in Philadelphia have adapted to various urban demands over time, he contends that they have maintained their traditions through characteristic patterns of leadership, communication, association, and identity formation. He explains:

> But just what was it that ethnic groups like the Irish maintained and transmitted concomitantly with their identity? It was their "tradition" -- that is, information about themselves, a social heritage, a set of views, and a process to fulfill their

> own values, all of which resulted in an awareness of group affinity. . . . Ethnic traditions are composed of a distinctive fund of historical experience and a particular array of symbols, usages, and attachments assumed to be part of the relevant heritage. Such a tradition is not a static mold of beliefs and behaviors. . . . An ethnic tradition is usually linked to a place, a people, and a legacy of recollections; for the Irish, this has meant reference to Ireland, its history, its internal social variations, and the phenomena of emigration. The Irish-American tradition has been a compound of folk and popular perception as well as objective reality. (p. 3)

In the next section, we will explore a number of studies from different disciplines as well as oral histories that attempt to elucidate Irish-American ethnicity from this third perspective.

Family Contributions to Academic Achievement

Ethnographic and Psychological Research. The last decades reveal a paucity of research on the achievement of Irish Americans in school. With few exceptions, Irish-Americans have not been separated out as an ethnic group when research examining the connections between family practices and children's achievement has been undertaken. Most frequently, the behaviors of groups identified as whites, African Americans and Asian Americans are compared (e.g., Dornbusch and Wood, 1989; Patterson, Kupersmidt, and Vaden, 1990); comparisons are made between middle-class and working-class families of either white or minority backgrounds (e.g., Lareau, 1986); or patterns of African Americans and whites within the same social class are compared (e.g., Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill, 1991).

An exception is a three volume study which explored the interaction effects of school and home environments on students of varying race, class, ethnicity, and gender (Genova, 1981). Because this is the only ethnographic and questionnaire study we found that included a specific treatment of the ethnicity of school-age Irish Americans, its results will be presented in some detail; nonetheless, the summary below is significantly oversimplified. For the ethnographic study, five ethnic groups were studied (Jewish American, Irish American, Armenian American, Portuguese American, and West-Indian American). The Irish-American sample consisted of ten lower-middle-class seventh graders from one community (six boys and four girls; but two of the boys dropped out after only a few sessions) who were visited an average of ten times. Each session lasted for an hour to an hour and a half; no notes or tape

recordings were taken at the time; informal interviews were alternated with activities or expeditions that took place in the home or neighborhood. Several of the children had parents of different ethnic backgrounds, and the children were second or third generation Irish American or unspecified.

The investigators found their subjects to be reticent. Although the children characterized their families as "close," the researchers noted little demonstrated affection, little explicit discussion of family problems, and some teasing. The mother was dominant in all the families. In terms of their ethnicity, the investigator wrote that the students knew that they were Irish but could not explain "what this entails or how this knowledge had been engendered" (Genova, v. 2, p. 265). Household routines were not formally structured, but a parental emphasis on children doing well in school was mentioned. Although the children's achievement level and interest in school varied, most did not enjoy school, finding it "generally a boring and over-regulated place" (v. 1, p. 45). School curriculum was not seen to be related to present interests or their adult lives. Parents attended and supported the boys' sports activities, but "few (were) seen to encourage and facilitate their children's involvement in other organized enterprises" (Genova, v. 2, p. 17).

The questionnaire survey (1,290 seventh and eighth grade students from 12 different ethnic backgrounds and five communities) reinforced the ethnographic study's finding of Irish parents' support for schooling. The Irish-American children (n=162) gave the **highest** ratings to the home climate variables that dealt with school learning and out of school learning. In terms of outcome variables, the Irish Americans were second only to the French Americans in standardized reading achievement scores, and about in the middle of the distribution in terms of grades and teachers' academic and social ratings of them.

Overall, although this study has methodological limitations and did not help us to determine whether differences among ethnic groups were due to socioeconomic class, recency of immigration, mixed ethnic background. or particular ethnicity, it did suggest many fruitful avenues for further study.

Clues from Family Counseling. McGoldrick (1982) writes of Irish families in a volume on ethnicity and family therapy. Such an analysis, of course, highlights characteristics of an ethnic group by drawing from the life stories of a subgroup of families: those who are seeking therapy for identified problems. Although the risks

of inaccurate generalization and stereotyping are high, there are some useful themes to explore, some of which have been identified by Genova (1981) and other authors. These include:

1) the inability of the Irish to express inner feelings ["Thus, although the Irish have a marvelous ability to tell stories, when it comes to their emotions, they may have no words" (p. 315)].

2) the emphasis on respectability ["To this day, Irish families will exhibit a strong desire to be liked and accepted and are very concerned with appearances" (p. 317)].

3) problems with severe emotional problems and alcoholism ["Until recently, Irish Americans had the highest psychiatric admission rate of ethnic groups in this country, especially for schizophrenia, organic psychosis, and alcoholism" (p. 317)].

4) an emphasis on suffering ["The Irish find virtue and sanctity in silent suffering and in 'offering up' their pain to God 'in imitation of Christ.' In life, one makes efforts to improve, but the inner conviction is that the efforts will fail and the Irish tend to get uncomfortable if things go too well for too long" (p. 319)].

5) In rearing children, there is an emphasis on the mother's domination and the specialness of mother-son bonds; a de-emphasis on praising children for fear of spoiling them or giving them a swelled head; discipline that is maintained by ridicule, belittling, and shaming; and an emphasis on achievement.

In one of her most revealing insights, McGoldrick (1982) focuses on the paradoxes which she finds at the center of Irish-American identity:

> The Irish are a paradoxical people. There is a saying: "The Great Gaels of Ireland are the men that made God mad, for all their wars are merry, and all their songs are sad." There is a striking charm, joviality, and clannishness when the Irish band together for a cause . . . and yet they seem to suffer from a sense of isolation, sadness, and tragedy. . . . The Irish will fight against all odds, and yet they have a strong sense of human powerlessness. . . . The culture places great value on conformity and respectability, and yet the Irish tend toward

eccentricity. Their history is full of rebels and fighters, and yet they tend to be compliant and accepting of authoritarian structures. They place great stock in loyalty to their own, and yet they often cut off relationships totally. They have a great sense of responsibility for what goes wrong, and yet they characteristically deny or project blame outward. (p. 311)

Seamus Heaney, a contemporary Irish poet, extends the theme of paradox further:

An old theme of my own, which is by no means original to me, is the doubleness of our focus in Ireland, our capacity to live in two places at one time and in two times at the one place. That invigorating philosopher and prodigy, Richard Kearney, has claimed this to be a distinguishing mark of what he is bold to call "the Irish mind," this capacity, shared by all traditions on the island, to acknowledge the claims of two contradicting truths at the one time, without having to reach for the guillotine in order to decide either/or, preferring instead the more generous and realistic approach of both/and. (1990, p. 22)

The sociology of the family. Sociologists have also helped us to study interaction patterns of Irish-American families. In a text on family patterns based on "historical research, the sociological eye, and detailed memories of growing up in a Massachusetts Irish parish community," Biddle (1981, p. 86) provides another echo of some of these themes. In the Irish Catholic family of the parish (1920-1950), children were taught to be respectable -- "to do the right thing and to be polite" (p. 101). Achievement in school was encouraged as well as outside play and experience. However, families valued stability and cohesion more than the individual's achievement ("The concept of equal treatment of each child remained subordinate to the concept of providing as best one could for all within the context of limited resources;" p. 102). Moreover, for boys, there was a greater emphasis on the importance of future work, whereas for girls, running a household was emphasized.

After 1950, Biddle (1981) found it essential to distinguish between working-class Irish in American Catholic enclaves and middle-class Catholic Irish families. For the working class, adaptation included:

. . . the lesser amount of overt affection, the favoritism toward sons, the attitudes of male authority, the preference for action, the use of alcohol to increase sociability, the obligations of families to care for one another, and the gathering of family members for rituals and holidays. (p. 106)

Middle-class Catholic Irish families could not be so easily characterized, and Biddle identified three diverse subgroups. One subgroup was very successful professionally and identified more with their organizations and professions than their church and neighborhood. A second subgroup identified positively with traditional American Catholic families, valuing the best available pre-college (and college) education for children. Mothers focused on child-rearing, while fathers focused on their work. The third subgroup Biddle identified maintained very close ties to the Vatican II Catholic church and emphasized spirituality and family togetherness. In each middle-class group, children's achievement in school was an important value. Though useful starting points, it is not clear from Biddle's analysis how these ethnic differences may be related to other variables, such as generation, income level, education, or degree of religious affiliation. Biddle (1981) concludes that "American Catholic Irish families retain differences from other groups, a striking example of cultural pluralism" (p. 112).

Oral histories. But what exactly are the essential differences in relation to children's achievement? And what might we expect ethnically identified Irish-American parents to transmit to the next generation, deliberately or not? The task may not be easy: as the Northern Irish poet Seamus Heaney suggests, the defining characteristics of Irish identity are somewhat ambiguous even to the Irish: "We are a dispersed people, whose history / Is a sensation of opaque fidelity" (Heaney, quoted in Hayes, 1990). To explore these questions further, Swap asked several Irish-American informants of Catholic backgrounds and high academic achievement to comment on the characteristics uncovered thus far in this narrative and to share additional insights by providing examples from their own family histories. What follows is a final effort to untangle these opaque truths about Irish-American achievement and identity, using a method with deep roots in Irish scholarship: the oral history.

Ann Rath is a first generation American, a recent immigrant from Ireland with resident status who is completing her doctorate at Harvard. Ann (personal communication, 11/1/91) explained that there was no ambiguity about the stress placed on school achievement in her family. She was one of fifteen children and grew up on a farm in Cork. When it became clear to Ann's mother that Ann was in the "dumb" track in school, she removed her from the school, placed her in another school, and insisted to the new headmaster that Ann had been getting all A's in the honors track in her former school. Ann's mother had been deprived of formal education herself, and though it was very difficult for her to lie to an authority figure, she was determined that her daughter would have the opportunities she missed. Ann is now well connected to the "new Irish"

community in Boston, and she observed that the emphasis on formal education is even more pronounced here than in Ireland. "Coming to America shows ambition in itself," she explained, "and most families, if they have sufficient resources, decide where to live based on the quality of the schools."

Michael Downing is in his thirties: a college professor, author of two published books of fiction, with a B.A. in Literature from Harvard. He is fourth generation Irish Catholic and the youngest of nine children. Both parents finished high school. His father died when he was two. All of his siblings went to college; many obtained higher degrees; most are now in business, teaching, or legal careers. When asked how his parents encouraged his achievement, his answer was very rich (Downing, personal communication, 11/7/91). He explained that "Getting a college education was the goal of my upbringing, the highest good, the final order." But there were many steps along that path. His earliest memory is peering over the window sill on an autumn day, watching the squirrels and birds, and pointing to things that his mother would explain: "The color of the leaves and the color of the lawn tell us why there is so much activity outside." His mother checked the homework of all the children every night. He studied in part so he could participate in the ritual of conversation and politics at the table: "to have a voice at the table, it was good to be educated." Moreover, "Reading was the single greatest good." The family went to the library every week and took out six books. Older siblings read passages out loud in the evenings and set some books as enticing goals ("Wait 'til you're old enough to read Treasure Island!"). They had three sets of encyclopedias of graduated difficulty, and they lay on the red rug to read them when they were bored. They were meant to be read in order, and Michael remembers the excitement of finally reaching the "I" volume, where he had been long told of the wonderful entry on Insects. He explained that: "The encyclopedias were like growth charts, and each time I finished a volume, I thought it was tremendous that there were still so many more to go!" Michael said that even today, as he reaches the last 20 pages of a particularly good book, he is reminded of the acute sense of loss he experienced when he reached the final pages of the last volume of the encyclopedias.

Marie Galvin's grandparents all came to America from Ireland. From a poor working-class background, Marie became a teacher, then a principal, and is currently director of Boston's Head Start programs. Support for Marie's academic interest came about through identification with her father (she looked like him; he was bright; her family confirmed that she was bright). Within the family's tradition, you were born brilliant or not; she was the bright one; her sister was the sick one. Her own excitement

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about learning was kindled by battles at the family dinner table over the exact meaning of words, or the exact location of a city or country on the map, or who could identify the most state capitals. She explained that her family was "very cold emotionally . . . and these intellectual battles over minutiae were our way of connecting and being close" (personal communication, 12/13/91).

Yet academic achievement was not without a struggle for Marie. Her family could not afford to send her to parochial school, but she did well enough to be admitted to Girl's Latin Academy, a prestigious public school in Boston. Her parents did not know that you could encourage a child in school, and there were no supports for her at the Academy where she felt she was "thrown out of her culture." After two and a half years, she flunked everything and just walked out, planning to leave school and get a job as her mother had done, since the pattern of going to work to support the family was a proud one in her family. Eventually she re-enrolled in a public school, graduated from high school and college and obtained a masters degree, though her father insisted that "Girls don't have to go to college." Marie's ambivalence continued in higher education: she did not do well in courses, though she obtained the highest mark in the freshman class on the teacher's exam. Marie, now in her late 50's, felt that her father was proud of her achievement though it was also threatening to him. They gave her free room and board at home so that she could attend college.

Each informant confirmed that educational achievement and hard work were highly valued in their families, though individual achievement that elevated one over others was frowned upon. Grades were not important. Instead, families emphasized working hard, supporting others in the community, and being well-behaved. In Michael's family, the beauty and coherence of knowledge was stressed along with the belief that one could learn anything once the basic building blocks were established. Michael mentioned that in his family, careers were not discussed, though the necessity of striking a balance between offering service to the community and receiving rewards was transmitted as a value.

It is unusual in America not to champion the elevation of the individual. Each of these informants agreed that opposition to this value is deeply felt by Irish Americans and that it weaves together many strands of their history. Marie explained that one of the sources of resistance to individual achievement is the centrality of the concept of struggle. Since Irish Catholic teaching venerates struggle and cherishes its moral rewards, the personal sacrifice involved in giving up individual ambitions is justified.

A second source of resistance to individual achievement is that elevation above others violates the key role of community in Irish-American culture. According to Michael, large families and hard times have made the support of the community as vital to survival as the family, and the community retains its right to shape youngsters and to comment on their progress. As Michael explained, "The community should comment -- life isn't your private ordeal." Both the family and the community share the concern that individual elevation may carry in it the seeds of separation from the community. "To go beyond is to permanently leave the family." And indeed, there is reality in this fear for Irish-Americans, whose history of diaspora has often confirmed that if you leave, you can never go back. For the Irish-American family, Michael suggests that there is another fear surrounding separation. Because there is so much that is not discussed in the family and so much that is repressed, there is concern that the individual could be an "emotional loose cannon," and the family's secrets could come out. In addition, there can be community resentment about individual success. As Ann said, "Ireland has been called the 'nation of begrudgers': if you are seen to be really getting ahead, it is resented; but if you are struggling, the community, happy to be needed, will always help you." (See Lee, 1988, pp. 646-648 for an extended discussion of begrudging as an Irish character trait.) For the Irish-American girl, there is yet another layer of concern: that an emphasis on individual achievement will create a tension between family and career, a tension that Michael explained is "alive and easily touched."

Parents played important roles in supporting achievement in each of these cases. For Marie, identification with her father and the excitement of family arguments over school-related topics stimulated her interest in learning and her belief in her ability. On the other hand, Marie also identified with her mother's pattern of leaving school for work and remembered that her parents did not realize how to encourage her success at Girl's Latin (As she was studying, "the neighborhood would parade in and out of this tiny room.") For Michael, sibling modeling, explicit maternal instruction and encouragement, and the enthusiastic offering of a variety of educational resources at home activated a love of learning and an easy confidence in school. Ann's mother actively intervened to protect her from a negative school experience.

These informants identified many aspects of their Irish heritage or tradition which recalled themes that have echoed over centuries: the romance of the Irish countryside; the poetry of the spoken word and the potency and prophecy of its stories; the wit and barb of Irish tongue; the celebration of mystery and mysticism; their receptiveness to the ritual and strength of the Church; the powerful, comforting, acceptance by the community that

demands no change in its eccentric members; the haunting beauty of the Irish ballads; the sharing of suffering and (as Michael puts it) "the absolute distrust of pleasure"; and the profound, mostly hidden continuity of these traditions in oneself and in one's countrymen and women.

Achievement and social class. Our exploration of the history of educational achievement for Irish Catholics in Ireland and America revealed significant obstacles to achievement based on poverty and religion. Although as we have seen, a reverence for learning has been part of the Irish tradition, the need for the family to survive and for all able-bodied family members to work has limited the hopes of many for higher education. Class continues to influence academic opportunity in Ireland today: the few spots available in Irish colleges go primarily to those students from middle- or upper-class backgrounds (Sr. Theresa McCormack, Dublin, personal communication, April 3, 1992).

In America, Irish working-class identity limited educational and occupational mobility for many. As Clark (1991) summarized:

> The barriers of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic discrimination, limited cultural expectations, militant anti-labor practices, and other disabilities retarded Irish-American occupational mobility. When such mobility ultimately did occur, the difficulty of achieving social stability in the face of a swiftly changing and frequently disruptive American economy was a constant in the history of a group that continued to have a large working-class component. (p. 4)

Although it is clear that Irish Americans have now achieved parity with other European Americans in overall status, limited expectations based on class may still be a factor in some Irish-American communities. For example, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's (1983) portrait of the Irish working-class students at Brookline High School in Massachusetts paints a picture of "tough kids" who battle with whatever group is lowest on the totem pole. The guidance counselor's assessment is that "'the Irish kids screw themselves. . . . They have directed their energy into a negative tradition, shut down their horizons. . . . Are they always going to have these attitudes?'" (p. 163)

There is a hefty literature available that correlates social class and achievement (Dornbusch and Wood, 1989). Snow et al. (1991) document declining achievement and lowered expectations as the Black and white working-class children in their sample progress from elementary through secondary school.

Sennett and Cobb (1972) provide a provocative initial analysis of the "hidden injuries of class" in which they document the paradoxical feelings of isolation and diminished self-respect experienced by the working-class individuals they interviewed who did achieve middle-class status. None of these studies focuses particularly on Irish working-class children, differentiates among children of different white European ethnicities, or helps us to understand the specific family processes or school or community opportunities which might be particularly helpful in counteracting negative expectations and supporting academic expectations in Irish-American families. Our conclusion is that the prevalence and roots of persistent "negative traditions" for Irish working-class children and their "antidotes" need to be further explored.

A Tentative Resolution of the Debate Over the Continuity of Irish Identity

The search for defining characteristics of Irish and Irish-American identity is not to be found in its language or in a single version of its history. As Brian Friel said in a recent interview, the Irish have learned that civilization itself "is an artificial construct that can be lost. Language can be lost." Deane (1991), the editor of an ambitious new anthology of Irish literature, expands on this theme:

> Versions of Ireland and its history and culture were created by many groups within the island -- colonists and colonized -- in attempts to ratify an existing political and economic system or to justify its alteration or its extinction. The failure of these cultural versions to achieve hegemony in alliance with a political system is more remarkable in a European country than it would be in those parts of the world that have been subject to European domination. (v. 1, p. xx)

As we have seen, just as the Irish in Ireland experienced several different "cultural versions" of their history and identity, so too did the Irish Americans. We have learned that the social meaning of ethnic identity can be altered depending on who is doing the defining, when, and for what purposes. Even today, for those Irish Americans who remain strongly ethnically identified, that identity may be more reliably transmitted (as it has been for centuries in Gaelic tradition) as it emanates from individual sagas of strength, risk-taking, and cleverness demonstrated by family and cultural heros and heroines; and as it is absorbed from fundamental values and behaviors of members of one's ethnic

community (whether community is defined as a geographical neighborhood, parish, or functional community).

The literature on the current status of Irish-American ethnicity suggests an additional conclusion. Irish-American ancestry does not appear to function as a master status which subsumes or dominates all others, as it generally does for African Americans or Puerto Ricans. Rather, the data suggest that some do not recognize their Irish-American heritage; some acknowledge ancestry but do not recognize its importance; some invest their ethnicity with symbolic importance; and some recognize and articulate a continuing historical and psychological tradition and their commitment to it. We would predict, as Alba (1990) discovered, that first- and second-generation Irish Americans view their traditions as more visible and important than do individuals of later generations.

We would also hypothesize, as Clark (1991) documented, that membership in an Irish-American community supports the continuity and clarity of Irish tradition. Community connections, which are both idealized and resisted, appear to result in characteristic ways of responding and valuing. Carroll (1992) shares the importance of his current connection with the Boston Irish community:

> It is a common observation about Boston that this is a tribal city. We know that the sub-groups of Boston, including the Irish of Southie, say, or Charlestown . . . have understood themselves largely in terms of a tribal solidarity that sharply defines a "we" and a "they." Tribes know who their friends are and who their enemies are. In America, particularly in Boston, this tribalism has provided to newcomers a much-needed comfort and identity in a larger culture that has been hostile and unwelcoming and, at the same time, homogeneous to the point of killing blandness. Tribalism has kept the juice flowing in our city. . . . I love Boston for making me Irish again. (p. 65)

PART V: IMPLICATIONS

Suggestions for Promoting School Success in Irish-American Children

For educators, the study of a group's history and its evolution in current family processes has some utility for generating suggestions about appropriate teaching practices. As Genova (1981) explained:

> A knowledge of documented ethnic differences may help educators gain reliable first-order approximations of the likely needs, skills, and characteristics of children from specific ethnic backgrounds, from which they can move to more precise formulations of appropriate programs for the youngsters as individuals; this contrasts with current tendencies to deal with ethnicity via stereotypes, or by pretending that it is irrelevant. (vol. 1, p. 104)

What ideas has our exploration generated about how family members or educators might support the school success of Irish-American youngsters? Attention to multiculturalism is widespread in American schools, and the uncovering of family and national roots has taken on added significance in our times. It is useful to recognize that children of white European backgrounds have specific cultural histories in America and their country of origin which need not be represented only by particular foods and holidays. The opportunity for a child to study her own history or literature adds personal meaning to these subjects: the quest to discover one's own identity is a powerful motivator of learning. Moreover, recognition of important themes in one's own culture may lead to curiosity about whether and how those themes are addressed in other cultures.

For those parents who recognize their Irish ethnic identity and encourage it in their children, one powerful link to success may be found in making rich use of the individual saga or oral history of Irish Americans whose lives the child might see as connected to his or her own. As Clark (1991) reminds us:

> Is there anything so Irish as a good story? It is not just that the Irish have produced a huge array of renowned short story artists, novelists, tale-tellers, and raconteurs that has exalted storytelling to an extraordinary level of skill among them. Perhaps of more significance is the fact that storytelling is still a living tradition for this people. It is not all just blather galore and miscellaneous pub talk. Rather, it is part of something ancient, human, and psychologically rewarding. (p. 8-9)

Poetry, drama, the written and spoken word are likely to be fertile avenues for emotional connection and learning for the Irish. Enrichment both at home and at school, and the exploration of storytelling as a vehicle for integrated learning might draw upon the potency of this heritage. Teachers might develop curriculum from O'Carroll's (1990) compilation of the oral histories of contemporary Irish-American women or Shannon's (1989) review of heros in Irish-American history; gather oral histories from family members, storytellers, heroes, or heroines in the local community; or even research and retell the great Celtic tales of Oisin or Cuchulain.

Because the tendency to label children is strong in the culture, perhaps both for parents and teachers ("the bright one; the sick one"), guidance in avoiding negative prophecies and in supporting children's hard work and evolving potential seems important. Moreover, the emotional reticence that characterized children in the ethnography, the oral histories, and the experiences of Irish Americans in family therapy may exist in some children and would need to be respected.

We have noted a long tradition of reverence for learning in Irish history; seen examples of parental sacrifice and support of children's learning; and recorded examples of parental confusion about how to communicate effectively with school authorities to support their children's success. The relatively greater effectiveness of the parochial school in educating Irish youngsters that Perlmann (1988) noted in the early decades of the 20th century may have resulted from the commitment to education embedded in the family's selection of a school; the higher level of expectation for children's academic potential; the presumed shared values and heritage of many teachers and parents; the clarity of organization and discipline, or some combination of all of these. At a minimum, it would be helpful to forge continuity of expectations and positive relationships between parents and public school teachers in order to signal a shared commitment to the child's learning. The respect for authority that may be a by-product of an Irish-Catholic heritage may lead some parents to adopt a policy of non-interference with the school. (Parental involvement in schools in Ireland is a brand new thrust which is encountering resistance from parents and educators.) Since parent involvement in school supports student achievement, educators may need to be explicit about encouraging two-way communication and other forms of family involvement.

Finally, the restriction on motivation and individual achievement that may be subtly reinforced by the Irish-American community (particularly in its homogenizing or "begrudging" aspects) may be approached through open discussion with families about the negative consequences of these attitudes on student scholarship, especially as they affect girls' achievement. At the same time, exploitation of the positive aspects of community in contributing motivation and support for children's learning might be achieved through a reliance on cooperative approaches to learning at home or in the classroom, experimentation with children taking on "roles," either in plays or debates, and the incorporation of community members into the life and "text" of the school.

The importance of the Irish tradition of valuing hard work and achievement cannot be underestimated as long as such hard work and achievement are rewarded by individual and group access to opportunity. Efforts to help children explore career options inside and outside of school can benefit all children and can be supported directly by partnerships with businesses and community agencies. Particularly in this period of recession, such efforts can help children to maintain hope in their future.

Studying a People's History Yields Powerful Insights

Another theme of this study is the power of looking carefully at a people's history. We were often surprised by the discoveries prompted by this review that should have been a part of our heritage. An initial revelation was that thousands of Irish were involuntarily sold into servitude and transported to the West Indies during the Cromwellian period. Another was that the famine Irish in America were at least temporarily seen as belonging to a non-Caucasian race. These facts, hard to reconcile with current realities of Irish-American assimilation into mainstream America, were the beginning of a long journey. Each subsequent discovery seemed to reconnect broken threads from remembered family experiences or scraps of history into a rich tapestry of new and familiar meanings. This search for meaning was both personally satisfying and academically exciting, as we anticipate it would be for other families and educators reclaiming their own ethnic histories. (See Hidalgo, 1992; Perry, 1992; Siu, 1992.)

As we have compared the immigrant histories of Irish Americans with other ethnic groups, we have come to appreciate the similar and unique experiences of

each ethnic group and have developed a more coherent picture of the reactions of society to outsiders. For example, Ogbu's (1983) distinction between autonomous, immigrant, and castelike minorities, though fruitful for understanding the experience of many minority groups in America, has been difficult to apply to the changing experiences of the Irish immigrants. Before the famine migration, Irish in America emigrated voluntarily and became autonomous minorities (i.e., a numerical subgroup, not subordinate politically and economically to the dominant group). The status of autonomous minority would also characterize the Irish in America today. Yet during the period of American history in which the experiences of the famine Irish dominated perceptions, they lost this "autonomous" status, and perhaps could not even be seen as "voluntary" immigrants, as Williams (1990) describes:

> The movement of immigrants from Ireland during the nineteenth century was not involuntary in the same way that the trade in people from Africa was. It was, nevertheless, involuntary because economic forces generated conditions that confronted many people from the lower social group in Ireland with the prospect of starving to death. (p. 133)

Were the famine Irish castelike minorities? Castelike minorities, according to Ogbu, "have usually been incorporated into their societies more or less involuntarily and permanently" (1983, p. 170). The castelike minorities that Ogbu describes are also racial minorities (e.g., African-American, Mexican-American). As we have seen, the famine Irish were temporarily perceived as members of the "barbarian" Celtic race, and they experienced severe economic discrimination. Moreover, the experience of the Irish in Protestant schools before 1900 foreshadows the "oppositional" culture that Ogbu (1987; 1990) describes as characteristic of African-American teenagers in many schools today. Ogbu (1990) argues that for these youngsters, instrumental and expressive barriers to achievement have resulted in identifying school with white mainstream culture and success in school with "acting White." He argues that with some exceptions, African-American adolescents have developed an array of behaviors that are oppositional to the dominant culture, including the rejection of school achievement. (Of course one might argue that Ogbu's formulation does not account for African Americans who are successful in school, or differentiate between schools that are organized to accept and support all students versus those that reject and fail most students of color.)

As we have seen, a similar pattern to the one Ogbu describes for African Americans occurred for many urban Irish in the decades between 1820 and 1900 as parents identified the culture of the public schools with Yankee (and English) oppression and found that success in these schools for their children was both remote and, if achieved, a betrayal of their Irish-Catholic heritage. On the other hand, the status of castelike minority does not apply to the Irish because the white/non-white distinction is so prominent in American society, and, of course, because the subordinate status of the Irish was not permanent.

Thus, a careful look at the history of different ethnic groups in America may help us to distinguish unique patterns. It may also help us to discover under what circumstances certain groups can improve their status. For example, variables that seem to have contributed to discrimination against the Irish during the 19th century and may emerge as predictive for other groups include: very low social and economic status in Ireland; the duration and severity of their oppression there; the vast numbers that arrived in the U.S. in a few locations over a short time span; the country's need for a source of unskilled, cheap labor during a period of industrial and territorial expansion; and the high degree of perceived difference between the Irish and the dominant culture. It would also be useful to explore whether the variables that seemed to allow the Irish to escape the castelike status they experienced during this period would also be predictive for other ethnic groups (i.e., the creation of alternative schools, the development of parallel social structures, the acquisition of political power, the opening up of the job market, the eventual designation of groups other than the Irish as "more" different from the dominant group, and continuing Irish support for achievement and hard work as cultural values).

Finally, our exploration of the Irish immigrants' experiences in America may help us to interpret current patterns of response to ethnic differences. Three examples must suffice. First, we may be able to view the societal reaction to the new waves of Haitian or Cuban immigrants to America not as isolated reactions to the unique characteristics of these groups, but as variations on a theme of psychological and economic protectionism by dominant groups, particularly in a time of economic recession.

Second, we have discovered in our historical survey of the Irish, a tendency to create and then overgeneralize ethnic stereotypes, assuming that all members

of a particular ethnic group, both in America and the country of origin, share the same negative characteristics and traits and therefore deserve the same (low) status and minimal mobility (Williams, 1990). Being alert to and critical of stereotyping in contemporary media and in our own thinking should influence our instruction of children.

Third, as a result of the exploration of the historical experiences of a variety of ethnic groups, we may be able to share with contemporary groups what we have learned about the paths to upward mobility. The particular "strategies" that the Irish developed in the 19th century are probably not useful to all groups in the current context (e.g., see Erie, 1988). What could be useful, though, is the dual recognition that immigrant groups need not be passive participants in an alienating process, and that there is much to be learned from the responses of other groups faced with discrimination.

The Social Meaning of Ethnicity is Constructed

One of the central themes of this paper has been the social construction of ethnicity. We have seen that the positive or negative meanings that have been assigned to members of the Irish-American ethnic group have been shaped by time and place, by economic need and opportunity, by individual families and the panorama of national and international events. Although status seems immutable from our particular vantage point in time and geography, our tracing of the acceptance given to the Irish in America has demonstrated that it is not.

The lesson for educators is our own power to construct positive images of children of varying ethnicities in our classrooms and our schools. Negative expectations can be replaced by positive expectations; unfamiliar histories can be discovered and embraced; differing family styles can be explored and accepted. What is constructed can be deconstructed. The familiar and wasteful cycle of scapegoating and deifying certain groups, of exclusion and inclusion, can be ended.

A parallel lesson is that it will be difficult for schools to be independent instruments of a more generous and inclusive philosophy of education. We have seen that what happens in the schools is usually a reflection of what is happening in the larger society. In the nineteenth century, schools adopted a "factory model"

of schooling that replicated the dominant economic model of the time and preserved and supported the social and economic hierarchies that were useful to society.

In America today, the factory model has fallen into disfavor as the exclusive route to industrial productivity. There are changes in industry's approaches to management, productivity, and technological innovation that could be productive for schools to adapt. Yet the 19th century factory model continues to be implemented today in many schools, with the newer additions of tracking and unequal funding exacerbating class and race differences. The search for and implementation of alternate models of school organization (such as school-based management and cooperative learning), though difficult, have already begun and are supported by the recognition that the factory model when applied to schooling is discriminatory, wasteful of potential, and counterproductive as a model for preparing tomorrow's citizens.

As educators, we envision a new structure for schools, one not based on a factory model, but on a collaborative model that supports a variety of approaches to teaching and learning for children and adults. Within this structure, students learn about democracy through direct experience, and decisions are made at the local level that reflect children's educational needs and the goals of the community. The curriculum is one that is designed to prepare all the children to succeed in a multicultural, highly technological society. Both respect for heritage and dreams of new possibilities are woven together by educators to help children prepare for a realized American democracy.

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